

ROBERT BROWNING'S WORKS
CENTENARY EDITION
IN TEN VOLUMES
VOLUME VI

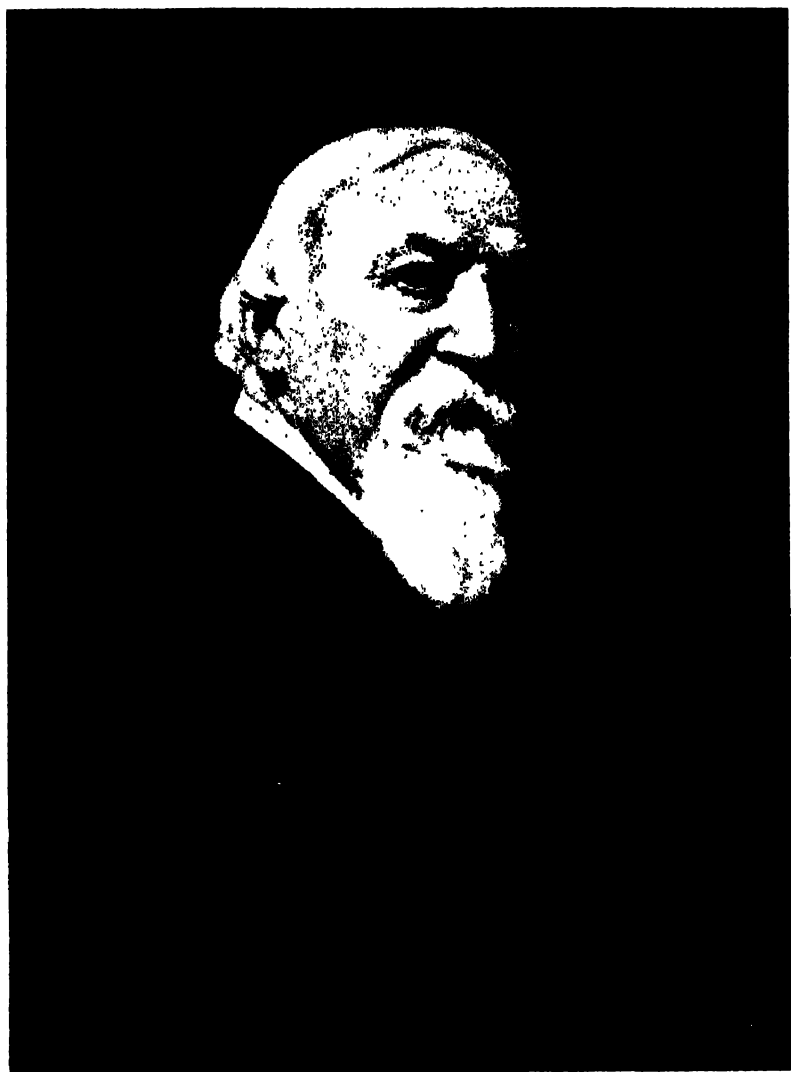


PLATE 11

Robert Browning
(aged 60)

From an unpublished photograph by 'W.' Greve, 1881

THE WORKS OF ROBERT BROWNING

WITH INTRODUCTIONS BY
SIR F. G. KENYON, K.C.B., D.LITT.

VOLUME VI—THE
RING AND THE BOOK
BOOKS VII—XII



REFERENCE



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PORTRAITS

ROBERT BROWNING (AGED 69)

From an unpublished photograph by W. H. Grove, 1851

FRONTISPIECE

POPE INNOCENT XII

From an engraving Faun, page 172

THE RING AND THE BOOK
BOOKS VII—XII

VOL. VI

A

THE RING AND THE BOOK

VII.—POMPILIA

I AM just seventeen years and five months old,
And, if I lived one day more, three full weeks ;
'T is writ so in the church's register,
Lorenzo in Lucina, all my names
At length, so many names for one poor child,
--Francesca Camilla Vittoria Angela
Dionisia Comparini,—laughable !
Also 't is writ that I was married there
Four years ago : and they will add, I hope,
When they insert my death, a word or two,—
Omitting all about the mode of death, —
This, in its place, this which one cares to know,
That I had been a mother of a son
Exactly two weeks. It will be through grace
O' the Curate, not through any claim I have ;
Because the boy was born at, so baptized
Close to, the Villa, in the proper church :
A pretty church, I say no word against,
Yet stranger-like,—while this Lorenzo seems
My own particular place, I always say.
I used to wonder, when I stood scarce high
As the bed here, what the marble lion meant,
With half his body rushing from the wall,
Eating the figure of a prostrate man—
(To the right, it is, of entry by the door)
An ominous sign to one baptized like me,

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK VII

Married, and to be buried there, I hope.
 And they should add, to have my life complete,
 He is a boy and Gaetan by name—
 Gaetano, for a reason,— if the friar 30
 Don Celestine will ask this grace for me
 Of Curate Ottoboni : he it was
 Baptized me : he remembers my whole life
 As I do his grey hair.

All these few things 35
 I know are true, —will you remember them?
 Because time flies. The surgeon cared for me,
 To count my wounds,—twenty-two dagger-
 wounds,
 Five deadly, but I do not suffer much
 Or too much pain, and am to die to-night. 40

Oh how good God is that my babe was born,
 —Better than born, baptized and hid away
 Before this happened, safe from being hurt !
 That had been sin God could not well forgive :
 He was too young to smile and save himself. 45
 When they took, two days after he was born,
 My babe away from me to be baptized
 And hidden awhile, for fear his foe should find,—
 The country-woman, used to nursing babes,
 Said “ Why take on so ? where is the great loss ? ” 50
 “ These next three weeks he will but sleep and
 feed,
 “ Only begin to smile at the month’s end ;
 “ He would not know you, if you kept him here,
 “ Sooner than that ; so, spend three merry weeks
 “ Snug in the Villa, getting strong and stout, 55
 “ And then I bring him back to be your own,
 “ And both of you may steal to- we know where ! ”
 The month—there wants of it two weeks this day !

Still, I half fancied when I heard the knock
At the Villa in the dusk, it might prove she— 60
Come to say "Since he smiles before the time,
"Why should I cheat you out of one good hour?
"Back I have brought him; speak to him and
judge!"

Now I shall never see him; what is worse,
When he grows up and gets to be my age, 65
He will seem hardly more than a great boy;
And if he asks "What was my mother like?"
People may answer "Like girls of seventeen"—
And how can he but think of this and that,
Lucias, Marias, Sofias, who titter or blush 70
When he regards them as such boys may do?
Therefore I wish someone will please to say
I looked already old though I was young;
Do! not . . . say, if you are by to speak . . .
Look nearer twenty? No more like, at least, 75
Girls who look arch or redden when boys laugh,
Than the poor Virgin that I used to know
At our street-corner in a lonely niche,—
The babe, that sat upon her knees, broke off,—
Thin white glazed clay, you pitied her the more: 80
She, not the gay ones, always got my rose.

How happy those are who know how to write!
Such could write what their son should read in
time,
Had they a whole day to live out like me.
Also my name is not a common name, 85
"Pompilia," and may help to keep apart
A little the thing I am from what girls are.
But then how far away, how hard to find
Will anything about me have become,
Even if the boy bethink himself and ask! 90
No father that he ever knew at all,

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK VII

Nor ever had—no, never had, I say !
 That is the truth,—nor any mother left,
 Out of the little two weeks that she lived,
 Fit for such memory as might assist : 95
 As good too as no family, no name,
 Not even poor old Pietro's name, nor hers,
 Poor kind unwise Violante, since it seems
 They must not be my parents any more.
 That is why something put it in my head 100
 To call the boy "Gaetano"—no old name
 For sorrow's sake ; I looked up to the sky
 And took a new saint to begin anew.
 One who has only been made saint—how long ?
 Twenty-five years : so, carefuller, perhaps, 105
 To guard a namesake than those old saints grow,
 Tired out by this time,—see my own five saints !

On second thoughts, I hope he will regard
 The history of me as what someone dreamed,
 And get to disbelieve it at the last : 110
 Since to myself it dwindles fast to that,
 Sheer dreaming and impossibility,
 Just in four days too ! All the seventeen years,
 Not once did a suspicion visit me
 How very different a lot is mine 115
 From any other woman's in the world.
 The reason must be, 't was by step and step
 It got to grow so terrible and strange.
 These strange woes stole on tiptoe, as it were,
 Into my neighbourhood and privacy, 120
 Sat down where I sat, laid them where I lay ;
 And I was found familiarised with fear,
 When friends broke in, held up a torch and cried
 "Why, you Pompilia in the cavern thus,
 "How comes that arm of yours about a wolf ? 125
 "And the soft length,—lies in and out your feet

“And laps you round the knee,—a snake it is!”
And so on.

Well, and they are right enough,
By the torch they hold up now : for first, observe, 130
I never had a father,—no, nor yet
A mother : my own boy can say at least
“I had a mother whom I kept two weeks!”
Not I, who little used to doubt . . . / doubt
Good Pietro, kind Violante, gave me birth? 135
They loved me always as I love my babe
(—Nearly so, that is—quite so could not be—)
Did for me all I meant to do for him,
Till one surprising day, three years ago,
They both declared, at Rome, before some judge 140
In some Court where the people flocked to hear,
That really I had never been their child,
Was a mere castaway, the careless crime
Of an unknown man, the crime and care too much
Of a woman known too well,—little to these, 145
Therefore, of whom I was the flesh and blood :
What then to Pietro and Violante, both
No more my relatives than you or you?
Nothing to them! You know what they declared.

So with my husband,—just such a surprise, 150
Such a mistake, in that relationship!
Everyone says that husbands love their wives,
Guard them and guide them, give them happiness;
'T is duty, law, pleasure, religion : well,
You see how much of this comes true in mine ! 155
People indeed would fain have somehow proved
He was no husband : but he did not hear,
Or would not wait, and so has killed us all.
Then there is . . . only let me name one more !
There is the friend,—men will not ask about, 160

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK VII

But tell untruths of, and give nicknames to,
 And think my lover, most surprise of all !
 Do only hear, it is the priest they mean,
 Giuseppe Caponsarchi : a priest—love,
 And love me ! Well, yet people think he did. 165
 I am married, he has taken priestly vows,
 They know that, and yet go on, say, the same,
 “ Yes, how he loves you ! ” “ That was love ”—

they say,
 When anything is answered that they ask :
 Or else “ No wonder you love him ”—they say. 170
 Then they shake heads, pity much, scarcely blame—
 As if we neither of us lacked excuse,
 And anyhow are punished to the full,
 And downright love atones for everything !
 Nay, I heard read out in the public Court 175
 Before the judge, in presence of my friends,
 Letters 't was said the priest had sent to me,
 And other letters sent him by myself,
 We being lovers !

Listen what this is like ! 180
 When I was a mere child, my mother . . . that 's
 Violante, you must let me call her so
 Nor waste time, trying to unlearn the word . . .
 She brought a neighbour's child of my own age
 To play with me of rainy afternoons ; 185
 And, since there hung a tapestry on the wall,
 We two agreed to find each other out
 Among the figures. “ Tisbe, that is you,
 “ With half-moon on your hair-knot, spear in hand,
 “ Flying, but no wings, only the great scarf 190
 “ Blown to a bluish rainbow at your back :
 “ Call off your hound and leave the stag alone ! ”
 “ —And there are you, Pompilia, such green leaves
 “ Flourishing out of your five finger-ends,
 “ And all the rest of you so brown and rough : 195

“Why is it you are turned a sort of tree?”
You know the figures never were ourselves
Though we nicknamed them so. Thus, all my life,—
As well what was, as what, like this, was not,—
Looks old, fantastic and impossible : 200
I touch a fairy thing that fades and fades.
—Even to my babe! I thought, when he was born,
Something began for once that would not end,
Nor change into a laugh at me, but stay
For evermore, eternally quite mine. 205
Well, so he is, -but yet they bore him off,
The third day, lest my husband should lay traps
And catch him, and by means of him catch me.
Since they have saved him so, it was well done :
Yet thence comes such confusion of what was 210
With what will be,— that late seems long ago,
And what years should bring round, already come,
Till even he withdraws into a dream
As the rest do : I fancy him grown great,
Strong, stern, a tall young man who tutors me, 215
Frowns with the others “Poor imprudent child !
“Why did you venture out of the safe street?
“Why go so far from help to that lone house?
“Why open at the whisper and the knock?”

Six days ago when it was New Year's-day, 220
We bent above the fire and talked of 'him,
What he should do when he was grown and great.
Violante, Pietro, each had given the arm
I leant on, to walk by, from couch to chair
And fireside,—laughed, as I lay safe at last, 225
“Pompilia's march from bed to board is made,
“Pompilia back again and with a babe,
“Shall one day lend his arm and help her walk!”
Then we all wished each other more New Years.
Pietro began to scheme—“Our cause is gained ; 230

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK VII

"The law is stronger than a wicked man :
 "Let him henceforth go his way, leave us ours !
 "We will avoid the city, tempt no more
 "The greedy ones by feasting and parade,—
 "Live at the other villa, we know where, 235
 "Still farther off, and we can watch the babe
 "Grow fast in the good air ; and wood is cheap
 "And wine sincere outside the city gate.
 "I still have two or three old friends will grope
 "Their way along the mere half-mile of road, 240
 "With staff and lantern on a moonless night
 "When one needs talk : they 'll find me, never
 fear,
 "And I 'll find them a flask of the old sort yet !"
 Violante said "You chatter like a crow :
 "Pompilia tires o' the tattle, and shall to bed : 245
 "Do not too much the first day,—somewhat more
 "To-morrow, and, the next, begin the cape
 "And hood and coat ! I have spun wool enough."
 Oh what a happy friendly eve was that !

And, next day, about noon, out Pietro went— 250
 He was so happy and would talk so much,
 Until Violante pushed and laughed him forth
 Sight-seeing in the cold,—“So much to see
 “I’ the churches ! Swathe your throat three
 times !” she cried,
 “And, above all, beware the slippery ways, 255
 “And bring us all the news by supper-time !”
 He came back late, laid by cloak, staff and hat,
 Powdered so thick with snow it made us laugh,
 Rolled a great log upon the ash o’ the hearth,
 And bade Violante treat us to a flask, 260
 Because he had obeyed her faithfully,
 Gone sight-see through the seven, and found no
 church

To his mind like San Giovanni—"There's the fold,
"And all the sheep together, big as cats!
"And such a shepherd, half the size of life, 265
"Starts up and hears the angel"—when, at the
door,
A tap : we started up : you know the rest.

Pietro at least had done no harm, I know ;
Nor even Violante, so much harm as makes
Such revenge lawful. Certainly she erred— 270
Did wrong, how shall I dare say otherwise?—
In telling that first falsehood, buying me
From my poor faulty mother at a price,
To pass off upon Pietro as his child.
If one should take my babe, give him a name, 275
Say he was not Gaetano and my own,
But that some other woman made his mouth
And hands and feet,—how very false were that !
No good could come of that ; and all harm did.
Yet if a stranger were to represent 280
"Needs must you either give your babe to me
"And let me call him mine for evermore,
"Or let your husband get him"—ah, my God,
That were a trial I refuse to face !
Well, just so here : it proved wrong but seemed
right 285
To poor Violante—for there lay, she said,
My poor real dying mother in her rags,
Who put me from her with the life and all,
Poverty, pain, shame and disease at once,
To die the easier by what price I fetched— 290
Also (I hope) because I should be spared
Sorrow and sin,—why may not that have helped ?
My father,—he was no one, any one,—
The worse, the likelier,—call him—he who came,
Was wicked for his pleasure, went his way, 295

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK VII

And left no trace to track by ; there remained
 Nothing but me, the unnecessary life,
 To catch up or let fall,--and yet a thing
 She could make happy, be made happy with,
 This poor Violante,-- who would frown thereat ? 300

Well, God, you see ! God plants us wherewe grow.
 It is not that because a bud is born
 At a wild briar's end, full i' the wild beast's way,
 W. ought to pluck and put it out of reach
 On the oak-tree top,--say "There the bud
 belongs !" 305

She thought, moreover, real lies were lies told
 For harm's sake ; whereas this had good at heart,
 Good for my mother, good for me, and good
 For Pietro who was meant to love a babe,
 And needed one to make his life of use, 310
 Receive his house and land when he should die.
 Wrong, wrong and always wrong ! how plainly
 wrong !

For see, this fault kept pricking, as faults do,
 All the same at her heart : this falsehood hatched,
 She could not let it go nor keep it fast. 315

She told me so,--the first time I was found
 Locked in her arms once more after the pain,
 When the nuns let me leave them and go home,
 And both of us cried all the cares away,--
 This it was set her on to make amends, 320
 This brought about the marriage simply this !

Do let me speak for her you blame so much !
 When Paul, my husband's brother, found me out,
 Heard there was wealth for who should marry me,
 So, came and made a speech to ask my hand 325
 For Guido, she, instead of piercing straight
 Through the pretence to the ignoble truth,
 Fancied she saw God's very finger point,

Designate just the time for planting me
 (The wild-briar slip she plucked to love and wear) 330
 In soil where I could strike real root, and grow,
 And get to be the thing I called myself :
 For, wife and husband are one flesh, God says,
 And I, whose parents seemed such and were none,
 Should in a husband have a husband now, 335
 Find nothing, this time, but was what it seemed,
 - All truth and no confusion any more.
 I know she meant all good to me, all pain
 To herself,— since how could it be aught but pain
 To give me up, so, from her very breast, 340
 The wilding flower-tree-branch that, all those years,
 She had got used to feel for and find fixed ?
 She meant well : has it been so ill i' the main ?
 That is but fair to ask : one cannot judge
 Of what has been the ill or well of life, 345
 The day that one is dying,—sorrows change
 Into not altogether sorrow-like ;
 I do see strangeness but scarce misery,
 Now it is over, and no danger more.
 My child is safe ; there seems not so much pain. 350
 It comes, most like, that I am just absolved,
 Purged of the past, the foul in me, washed fair,—
 One cannot both have and not have, you know,—
 Being right now, I am happy and colour things.
 Yes, everybody that leaves life sees all 355
 Softened and bettered : so with other sights :
 To me at least was never evening yet
 But seemed far beautifuller than its day,
 For past is past.

There was a fancy came, 360
 When somewhere, in the journey with my friend,
 We stepped into a hovel to get food ;
 And there began a yelp here, a bark there,—

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK VII

Misunderstanding creatures that were wroth
 And vexed themselves and us till we retired. 365
 The hovel is life : no matter what dogs bit
 Or cats scratched in the hovel I break from,
 All outside is lone field, moon and such peace —
 Flowing in, filling up as with a sea
 Whereon comes Someone, walks fast on the white, 370
 Jesus Christ's self, Don Celestine declares,
 To meet me and calm all things back again.

Beside, up to my marriage, thirteen years
 Were, each day, happy as the day was long :
 This may have made the change too terrible. 375
 I know that when Violante told me first
 The cavalier—she meant to bring next morn,
 Whom I must also let take, kiss my hand—
 Would be at San Lorenzo the same eve
 And marry me,—which over, we should go 380
 Home both of us without him as before,
 And, till she bade speak, I must hold my tongue,
 Such being the correct way with girl-brides,
 From whom one word would make a father blush,—
 I know, I say, that when she told me this, 385

Well, I no more saw sense in what she said
 Than a lamb does in people clipping wool ;
 Only lay down and let myself be clipped.
 And when next day the cavalier who came—
 ('Tisbe had told me that the slim young man 390
 With wings at head, and wings at feet, and sword
 Threatening a monster, in our tapestry,
 Would eat a girl else,—was a cavalier)
 When he proved Guido Franceschini,—old
 And nothing like so tall as I myself, 395
 Hook-nosed and yellow in a bush of beard,
 Much like a thing I saw on a boy's wrist,
 He called an owl and used for catching birds,—

And when he took my hand and made a smile—
 Why, the uncomfortableness of it all 400
 Seemed hardly more important in the case
 Than,—when one gives you, say, a coin to spend,—
 Its newness or its oldness ; if the piece
 Weigh properly and buy you what you wish,
 No matter whether you get grime or glare ! 405
 Men take the coin, return you grapes and figs.
 Here, marriage was the coin, a dirty piece
 Would purchase me the praise of those I loved :
 About what else should I concern myself?

So, hardly knowing what a husband meant, 410
 I supposed this or any man would serve,
 No whit the worse for being so uncouth :
 For I was ill once and a doctor came
 With a great ugly hat, no plume thereto,
 Black jerkin and black buckles and black sword, 415
 And white sharp beard over the ruff in front,
 And oh so lean, so sour-faced and austere !--
 Who felt my pulse, made me put out my tongue,
 Then oped a phial, dripped a drop or two
 Of a black bitter something,—I was cured ! 420
 What mattered the fierce beard or the grim face ?
 It was the physic beautified the man,
 Master Malpichi,—never met his match
 In Rome, they said,—so ugly all the same !

However, I was hurried through a storm, 425
 Next dark eve of December's dearest day—
 How it rained !—through our street and the Lion's-
 mouth
 And the bit of Corso,—cloaked round, covered
 close,
 I was like something strange or contraband,—
 Into blank San Lorenzo, up the aisle, 430

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK VII

My mother keeping hold of me so tight,
 I fancied we were come to see a corpse
 Before the altar which she pulled me toward.
 There we found waiting an unpleasant priest
 Who proved the brother, not our parish friend, 435
 But one with mischief-making mouth and eye,
 Paul, whom I know since to my cost. And then
 I heard the heavy church-door lock out help
 Behind us : for the customary warmth,
 Two tapers shivered on the altar. "Quick— 440
 "Lose no time !" cried the priest. And straight-
 way down
 From . . . what 's behind the altar where he hid—
 Hawk-nose and yellowness and bush and all,
 Stepped Guido, caught my hand, and there was I
 O' the chancel, and the priest had opened book, 445
 Read here and there, made me say that and this,
 And after, told me I was now a wife,
 Honoured indeed, since Christ thus weds the
 Church,
 And therefore turned he water into wine,
 To show I should obey my spouse like Christ. 450
 Then the two slipped aside and talked apart,
 And I, silent and scared, got down again
 And joined my mother who was weeping now.
 Nobody seemed to mind us any more,
 And both of us on tiptoe found our way 455
 To the door which was unlocked by this, and wide.
 When we were in the street, the rain had stopped,
 All things looked better. At our own house-door,
 Violante whispered "No one syllable
 "To Pietro ! Girl-brides never breathe a word !" 460
 "—Well treated to a wetting, drizzle-tails !"
 Laughed Pietro as he opened - "Very near
 "You made me brave the gutter's roaring sea
 "To carry off from roost old dove and young,

"Trussed up in church, the cote, by me, the kite ! 465

"What do these priests mean, praying folk to
death

"On stormy afternoons, with Christmas close

"To wash our sins off nor require the rain ?"

Violante gave my hand a timely squeeze,
Madonna saved me from immodest speech, 470
I kissed him and was quiet, being a bride.

When I saw nothing more, the next three weeks,
Of Guido—"Nor the Church sees Christ" thought I:

"Nothing is changed however, wine is wine

"And water only water in our house. 475

"Nor did I see that ugly doctor since

"That cure of the illness : just as I was cured,

"I am married, -neither scarecrow will return."

Three weeks, I chuckled—"How would Giulia
stare,

"And Tecla smile and Tisbe laugh outright, 480

"Were it not impudent for brides to talk !"—

Until one morning, as I sat and sang

At the broidery-frame alone i' the chamber,—loud

Voices, two, three together, sobbings too,

And my name, "Guido," "Paolo," flung like
stones 485

From each to the other ! In I ran to see.

There stood the very Guido and the priest

With sly face,—formal but nowise afraid,—

While Pietro seemed all red and angry, scarce

Able to stutter out his wrath in words ; 490

And this it was that made my mother sob,

As he reproached her—"You have murdered us,

"Me and yourself and this our child beside !"

Then Guido interposed "Murdered or not,

"Be it enough your child is now my wife ! 495

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK VII

"I claim and come to take her." Paul put in,
 "Consider—kinsman, dare I term you so?—
 "What is the good of your sagacity
 "Except to counsel in a strait like this?
 "I guarantee the parties man and wife 500
 "Whether you like or loathe it, bless or ban.
 "May spilt milk be put back within the bowl—
 "The done thing, undone? You, it is, we look
 "For counsel to, you fittest will advise!
 "Since milk, though spilt and spoilt, does marble
 good, 505
 "Better we down on knees and scrub the floor,
 "Than sigh, 'the waste would make a syllabub!'
 "*Help us so turn disaster to account,*
 "So predispose the groom, he needs shall grace
 "The bride with favour from the very first, 510
 "Not begin marriage an embittered man!"
 He smiled,—the game so wholly in his hands!
 While fast and faster sobbed Violante—"Ay,
 "All of us murdered, past averting now!
 "O my sin, O my secret!" and such like. 515

Then I began to half surmise the truth;
 Something had happened, low, mean, underhand,
 False, and my mother was to blame, and I
 To pity, whom all spoke of, none addressed:
 I was the chattel that had caused a crime. 520
 I stood mute,—those who tangled must untie
 The embroilment. Pietro cried "Withdraw, my
 child!
 "She is not helpful to the sacrifice
 "At this stage,—do you want the victim by
 "While you discuss the value of her blood? 525
 "For her sake, I consent to hear you talk:
 "Go, child, and pray God help the innocent!"

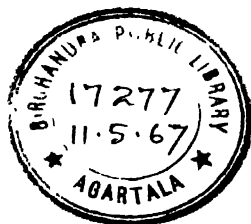
*I did go and was praying God, when came
Violante, with eyes swollen and red enough,
But movement on her mouth for make-believe* 530
*Matters were somehow getting right again.
She bade me sit down by her side and hear.
“You are too young and cannot understand,
“Nor did your father understand at first.
“I wished to benefit all three of us,* 535
*“And when he failed to take my meaning,—why,
“I tried to have my way at unaware—
“Obtained him the advantage he refused.
“As if I put before him wholesome food
“Instead of broken victual,—he finds change* 540
*“I’ the viands, never cares to reason why,
“But falls to blaming me, would fling the plate
“From window, scandalize the neighbourhood,
“Even while he smacks his lips,—men’s way, my
child !
“But either you have prayed him unperverse* 545
*“Or I have talked him back into his wits :
“And Paolo was a help in time of need,—
“Guido, not much—my child, the way of men !
“A priest is more a woman than a man,
“And Paul did wonders to persuade. In short,* 550
*“Yes, he was wrong, your father sees and says ;
“My scheme was worth attempting : and bears
fruit,
“Gives you a husband and a noble name,
“A palace and no end of pleasant things.
“What do you care about a handsome youth ?* 555
*“They are so volatile, and tease their wives !
“This is the kind of man to keep the house.
“We lose no daughter, gain a son, that ’s all :
“For ’t is arranged we never separate,
“Nor miss, in our grey time of life, the tints* 560
“Of you that colour eve to match with morn.

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK VII

"In good or ill, we share and share alike,
 "And cast our lots into a common lap,
 "And all three die together as we lived!
 "Only, at Arezzo,—that 's a Tuscan town, 565
 "Not so large as this noisy Rome, no doubt,
 "But older far and finer much, say folk,—
 "In a great palace where you will be queen,
 "Know the Archbishop and the Governor,
 "And we see homage done you ere we die. 570
 "Therefore, be good and pardon!" — "Pardon
 what?
 "You know things, I am very ignorant:
 "All is right if you only will not cry!"

And so an end! Because a blank begins
 From when, at the word, she kissed me hard and
 hot, 575
 And took me back to where my father leaned
 Opposite Guido—who stood eying him,
 As eyes the butcher the cast panting ox
 That feels his fate is come, nor struggles more,—
 While Paul looked archly on, pricked brow at
 whiles 580
 With the pen-point as to punish triumph there,—
 And said "Count Guido, take your lawful wife
 "Until death part you!"

All since is one blank,
 Over and ended; a terrific dream. 585
 It is the good of dreams—so soon they go!
 Wake in a horror of heart-beats, you may
 Cry "The dread thing will never from my
 thoughts!"
 Still, a few daylight doses of plain life,
 Cock-crow and sparrow-chirp, or bleat and bell 590
 Of goats that trot by, tinkling, to be milked;



And when you rub your eyes awake and wide,
Where is the harm o' the horror? Gone! So
here.

I know I wake, but from what? Blank, I say!
'This is the note of evil: for good lasts. 595

Even when Don Celestine bade "Search and find!

"For your soul's sake, remember what is past,

"The better to forgive it,"—all in vain!

What was fast getting indistinct before,
Vanished outright. By special grace perhaps, 600

Between that first calm and this last, four years

Vanish, --one quarter of my life, you know.

I am held up, amid the nothingness,

By one or two truths only—thence I hang, 605

And there I live,---the rest is death or dream,

All but those points of my support. I think

Of what I saw at Rome once in the Square

O' the Spaniards, opposite the Spanish House:

There was a foreigner had trained a goat,

A shuddering white woman of a beast, 610

To climb up, stand straight on a pile of sticks

Put close, which gave the creature room enough:

When she was settled there he, one by one,

Took away all the sticks, left just the four

Whereon the little hoofs did really rest, 615

There she kept firm, all underneath was air.

So, what I hold by, are my prayer to God,

My hope, that came in answer to the prayer,

Some hand would interpose and save me—hand

Which proved to be my friend's hand: and,—best

bliss, 620

That fancy which began so faint at first,

That thrill of dawn's suffusion through my dark,

Which I perceive was promise of my child,

The light his unborn face sent long before, —

God's way of breaking the good news to flesh. 625

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK VII

That is all left now of those four bad years.
 Don Celestine urged "But remember more!
 "Other men's faults may help me find your own.
 "I need the cruelty exposed, explained,
 "Or how can I advise you to forgive?" 630
 He thought I could not properly forgive
 Unless I ceased forgetting,—which is true :
 For, bringing back reluctantly to mind
 My husband's treatment of me,—by a light
 That 's later than my life-time, I review 635
 And comprehend much and imagine more,
 And have but little to forgive at last.
 For now,—be fair and say,—is it not true
 He was ill-used and cheated of his hope
 To get enriched by marriage? Marriage gave 640
 Me and no money, broke the compact so :
 He had a right to ask me on those terms,
 As Pietro and Violante to declare
 They would not give me : so the bargain stood :
 They broke it, and he felt himself aggrieved, 645
 Became unkind with me to punish them.
 They said 't was he began deception first,
 Nor, in one point whereto he pledged himself,
 Kept promise : what of that, suppose it were?
 Echoes die off, scarcely reverberate 650
 For ever,—why should ill keep echoing ill
 And never let our ears have done with noise?
 Then my poor parents took the violent way
 To thwart him,—he must needs retaliate,—wrong,
 Wrong, and all wrong,—better say, all blind! 655
 As I myself was, that is sure, who else
 Had understood the mystery : for his wife
 Was bound in some sort to help somehow there.
 It seems as if I might have interposed,
 Blunted the edge of their resentment so, 660
 Since he vexed me because they first vexed him ;

"I will entreat them to desist, submit,
 "Give him the money and be poor in peace,—
 "Certainly not go tell the world : perhaps
 "He will grow quiet with his gains." 665

Yes, say

Something to this effect and you do well !
 But then you have to see first : I was blind.
 That is the fruit of all such wormy ways,
 The indirect, the unapproved of God : 670
 You cannot find their author's end and aim,
 Not even to substitute your good for bad,
 Your straight for the irregular ; you stand
 Stupefied, profitless, as cow or sheep
 That miss a man's mind, anger him just twice 675
 By trial at repairing the first fault.
 Thus, when he blamed me, "You are a coquette,
 "A lure-owl posturing to attract birds,
 "You look love-lures at theatre and church,
 "In walk, at window !" —that, I knew, was false : 680
 But why he charged me falsely, whither sought
 To drive me by such charge, — how could I know ?
 So, unaware, I only made things worse.
 I tried to soothe him by abjuring walk,
 Window, church, theatre, for good and all, 685
 As if he had been in earnest : that, you know,
 Was nothing like the object of his charge.
 Yes, when I got my maid to supplicate
 The priest, whose name she read when she would
 read
 Those feigned false letters I was forced to hear 690
 Though I could read no word of, —he should cease
 Writing, —nay, if he minded prayer of mine,
 Cease from so much as even pass the street
 Whereon our house looked, —in my ignorance
 I was just thwarting Guido's true intent ; 695

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK VII

Which was, to bring about a wicked change
 Of sport to earnest, tempt a thoughtless man
 To write indeed, and pass the house, and more,
 Till both of us were taken in a crime.
 He ought not to have wished me thus act lies, 700
 Simulate folly : but, --wrong or right, the wish, --
 I failed to apprehend its drift. How plain
 It follows, --if I fell into such fault,
 He also may have overreached the mark,
 Made mistake, by perversity of brain, 705
 I the whole sad strange plot, the grotesque intrigue
 To make me and my friend unself ourselves,
 Be other man and woman than we were !
 Think it out, you who have the time ! for me, --
 I cannot say less ; more I will not say. 710
 Leave it to God to cover and undo !
 Only, my dulness should not prove too much !
 --Not prove that in a certain other point
 Wherein my husband blamed me, --and you blame,
 If I interpret smiles and shakes of head, - 715
 I was dull too. Oh, if I dared but speak !
 Must I speak ? I am blamed that I forwent
 A way to make my husband's favour come.
 That is true : I was firm, withstood, refused . . .
 --Women as you are, how can I find the words ? 720

I felt there was just one thing Guido claimed
 I had no right to give nor he to take ;
 We being in estrangement, soul from soul :
 Till, when I sought help, the Archbishop smiled,
 Inquiring into privacies of life, 725
 --Said I was blameable--(he stands for God)
 Nowise entitled to exemption there.
 Then I obeyed, -- as surely had obeyed
 Were the injunction " Since your husband bids,
 " Swallow the burning coal he proffers you ! " 730

But I did wrong, and he gave wrong advice
 Though he were thrice Archbishop,—that, I
 know !

Now I have got to die and see things clear.
 Remember I was barely twelve years old—
 A child at marriage : I was let alone 735

For weeks, I told you, lived my child-life still
 Even at Arezzo, when I woke and found
 First . . . but I need not think of that again—
 Over and ended ! Try and take the sense
 Of what I signify, if it must be so. 740

After the first, my husband, for hate's sake,
 Said one eve, when the simpler cruelty
 Seemed somewhat dull at edge and fit to bear,
 " We have been man and wife six months almost :
 " How long is this your comedy to last ? 745

" Go this night to my chamber, not your own !"
 At which word, I did rush—most true the charge—
 And gain the Archbishop's house—he stands for
 God—

And fall upon my knees and clasp his feet,
 Praying him hinder what my estranged soul 750
 Refused to bear, though patient of the rest :

" Place me within a convent," I implored—
 " Let me henceforward lead the virgin life
 " You praise in Her you bid me imitate !"
 What did he answer ? " Folly of ignorance " 755

" Know, daughter, circumstances make or mar
 " Virginity, 't is virtue or 't is vice.

" That which was glory in the Mother of God
 " Had been, for instance, damnable in Eve
 " Created to be mother of mankind. 760

" Had Eve, in answer to her Maker's speech
 " ' Be fruitful, multiply, replenish earth '—
 " Pouted ' But I choose rather to remain
 " ' Single '—why, she had spared herself forthwith

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK VII

"Further probation by the apple and snake, 765
 "Been pushed straight out of Paradise! For see—
 "If motherhood be qualified impure,
 "I catch you making God command Eve sin!
 "—A blasphemy so like these Molinists',
 "I must suspect you dip into their books." 770
 Then he pursued "'T was in your covenant!"

No! There my husband never used deceit.
 He never did by speech nor act imply
 "Because of our souls' yearning that we meet
 "And mix in soul through flesh, which yours and
 mine 775
 "Wear and impress, and make their visible selves,
 "—All which means, for the love of you and me,
 "Let us become one flesh, being one soul!"
 He only stipulated for the wealth;
 Honest so far. But when he spoke as plain— 780
 Dreadfully honest also—"Since our souls
 "Stand each from each, a whole world's width
 between,
 "Give me the fleshly vesture I can reach
 "And rend and leave just fit for hell to burn!"—
 Why, in God's name, for Guido's soul's own sake 785
 Imperilled by polluting mine,—I say,
 I did resist; would I had overcome!

My heart died out at the Archbishop's smile;
 —It seemed so stale and worn a way o' the world,
 As though 't were nature frowning—"Here is
 Spring, 790
 "The sun shines as he shone at Adam's fall,
 "The earth requires that warmth reach everywhere:
 "What, must your patch of snow be saved forsooth
 "Because you rather fancy snow than flowers?"
 Something in this style he began with me. 795

Last he said, savagely for a good man,

"This explains why you call your husband harsh,

"Harsh to you, harsh to whom you love. God's
Bread!

"The poor Count has to manage a mere child

"Whose parents leave untaught the simplest
things

800

"Their duty was and privilege to teach,—

"Goodwives' instruction, gossips' lore: they
laugh

"And leave the Count the task,—or leave it me!"

Then I resolved to tell a frightful thing.

"I am not ignorant,—know what I say,

805

"Declaring this is sought for hate, not love.

"Sir, you may hear things like almighty God.

"I tell you that my housemate, yes—the priest

"My husband's brother, Canon Girolamo—

"Has taught me what depraved and misnamed
love

810

"Means, and what outward signs denote the sin,

"For he solicits me and says he loves,

"The idle young priest with nought else to do.

"My husband sees this, knows this, and lets be.

"Is it your counsel I bear this beside?"

815

"—More scandal, and against a priest this time!

"What, 't is the Canon now?"—less snappishly—

"Rise up, my child, for such a child you are.

"The rod were too advanced a punishment!

"Let 's try the honeyed cake. A parable!

820

"Without a parable spake He not to them."

"There was a ripe round long black toothsome
fruit,

"Even a flower-fig, the prime boast of May.

"And, to the tree, said . . . either the spirit o'
the fig,

"Or, if we bring in men, the gardener,

825

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK VII

" Archbishop of the orchard--had I time
 " To try o' the two which fits in best : indeed
 " It might be the Creator's self, but then
 " The tree should bear an apple, I suppose,--
 " Well, anyhow, one with authority said 830
 " ' Ripe fig, burst skin, regale the fig-pecker--
 " ' The bird whereof thou art a perquisite !'
 " ' Nay,' with a flounce, replied the restif fig,
 " ' I much prefer to keep my pulp myself :
 " ' He may go breakfastless and dinnerless, 835
 " ' Supperless of one crimson seed, for me !'
 " So, back she flopped into her bunch of leaves.
 " He flew off, left her, --did the natural lord,--
 " And lo, three hundred thousand bees and wasps
 " Found her out, feasted on her to the shuck : 840
 " Such gain the fig's that gave its bird no bite !
 " The moral,-- fools elude their proper lot,
 " Tempt other fools, get ruined all alike.
 " Therefore go home, embrace your husband
 quick !
 " Which if his Canon brother chance to see, 845
 " He will the sooner back to book again."

So, home I did go ; so, the worst befell :
 So, I had proof the Archbishop was just man,
 And hardly that, and certainly no more.
 For, miserable consequence to me, 850
 My husband's hatred waxed nor waned at all,
 His brother's boldness grew effrontery soon,
 And my last stay and comfort in myself
 Was forced from me : henceforth I looked to God
 Only, nor cared my desecrated soul 855
 Should have fair walls, gay windows for the world.
 God's glimmer, that came through the ruin-top,
 Was witness why all lights were quenched inside :
 Henceforth I asked God counsel, not mankind.

So, when I made the effort, freed myself, 860
They said—"No care to save appearance here!
"How cynic, when, how wanton, were enough!"
—Adding, it all came of my mother's life—
My own real mother, whom I never knew,
Who did wrong (if she needs must have done
wrong) 865

Through being all her life, not my four years,
At mercy of the hateful: every beast
O' the field was wont to break that fountain-fence,
Trample the silver into mud so murk
Heaven could not find itself reflected there. 870
Now they cry "Out on her, who, plashy pool,
"Bequeathed turbidity and bitterness
"To the daughter-stream where Guido dipt and
drank!"

Well, since she had to bear this brand—let me!
The rather do I understand her now, 875
From my experience of what hate calls love, -
Much love might be in what their love called hate.
If she sold . . . what they call, sold . . . me her
child—

I shall believe she hoped in her poor heart
That I at least might try be good and pure. 880
Begin to live untempted, not go doomed
And done with ere once found in fault, as she.
Oh and, my mother, it all came to this?
Why should I trust those that speak ill of you,
When I mistrust who speaks even well of them? 885
Why, since all bound to do me good, did harm,
May not you, seeming as you harmed me most,
Have meant to do most good—and feed your child
From bramble-bush, whom not one orchard-tree
But drew bough back from, nor let one fruit fall? 890
This it was for you sacrificed your babe?

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK VII

Gained just this, giving your heart's hope away
As I might give mine, loving it as you,
If . . . but that never could be asked of me !

There, enough ! I have my support again, 895
Again the knowledge that my babe was, is,
Will be mine only. Him, by death, I give
Outright to God, without a further care,—
But not to any parent in the world,—
So to be safe : why is it we repine ? 900
What guardianship were safer could we choose ?
All human plans and projects come to nought :
My life, and what I know of other lives,
Prove that : no plan nor project ! God shall care !

And now you are not tired ? How patient then 905
All of you,—Oh yes, patient this long while
Listening, and understanding, I am sure !
Four days ago, when I was sound and well
And like to live, no one would understand.
People were kind, but smiled “ And what of him, 910
“ Your friend, whose tonsure the rich dark brown
hides ?
“ There, there !—your lover, do we dream he was ?
“ A priest too—never were such naughtiness !
“ Still, he thinks many a long think, never fear,
“ After the shy pale lady,—lay so light 915
“ For a moment in his arms, the lucky one ! ”
And so on : wherefore should I blame you much ?
So we are made, such difference in minds,
Such difference too in eyes that see the minds !
That man, you misinterpret and misprise— 920
The glory of his nature, I had thought,
Shot itself out in white light, blazed the truth
Through every atom of his act with me :
Yet where I point you, through the crystal shrine,

Purity in quintessence, one dew-drop, 925
 You all descry a spider in the midst.
 One says "The head of it is plain to see,"
 And one, "They are the feet by which I judge,"
 All say, "Those films were spun by nothing else."

Then, I must lay my babe away with God, 930
 Nor think of him again, for gratitude.
 Yes, my last breath shall wholly spend itself
 In one attempt more to disperse the stain,
 Themistfromother breath fond mouths have made,
 About a lustrous and pellucid soul : 935
 So that, when I am gone but sorrow stays,
 And people need assurance in their doubt
 If God yet have a servant, man a friend,
 The weak a saviour and the vile a foe,—
 Let him be present, by the name invoked, 940
 Giuseppe-Maria Caponsacchi !

There,
 Strength comes already with the utterance !
 I will remember once more for his sake
 The sorrow : for he lives and is belied. 945
 Could he be here, how he would speak for me !

I had been miserable three drear years
 In that dread palace and lay passive now,
 When I first learned there could be such a man.
 Thus it fell : I was at a public play, 950
 In the last days of Carnival last March,
 Brought there I knew not why, but now know well.
 My husband put me where I sat, in front ;
 Then crouched down, breathed cold through me
 from behind,
 Stationed i' the shadow,—none in front could see,— 955
 I, it was, faced the stranger-throng beneath,

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK VII

The crowd with upturned faces, eyes one stare,
 Voices one buzz. I looked but to the stage,
 Whereon two lovers sang and interchanged
 "True life is only love, love only bliss : 960
 "I love thee—thee I love!" then they embraced.
 I looked thence to the ceiling and the walls,—
 Over the crowd, those voices and those eyes,—
 My thoughts went through the roof and out, to
 Rome

On wings of music, waft of measured words,— 965
 Set me down there, a happy child again
 Sure that to-morrow would be festa-day,
 Hearing my parents praise past festas more,
 And seeing they were old if I was young,
 Yet wondering why they still would end discourse 970
 With "We must soon go, you abide your time,
 "And,—might we haply see the proper friend
 "Throw his arm over you and make you safe!"

Sudden I saw him ; into my lap there fell
 A foolish twist of comfits, broke my dream 975
 And brought me from the air and laid me low,
 As ruined as the soaring bee that 's reached
 (So Pietro told me at the Villa once)
 By the dust-handful. There the comfits lay :
 I looked to see who flung them, and I faced 980
 This Caponsacchi, looking up in turn.
 Ere I could reason out why, I felt sure,
 Whoever flung them, his was not the hand,—
 Up rose the round face and good-natured grin
 Of one who, in effect, had played the prank, 985
 From covert close beside the earnest face,—
 Fat waggish Conti, friend of all the world.
 He was my husband's cousin, privileged
 To throw the thing : the other, silent, grave,
 Solemn almost, saw me, as I saw him. 990

There is a psalm Don Celestine recites,
 "Had I a dove's wings, how I fain would flee!"
 The psalm runs not "I hope, I pray for wings,"—
 Not "If wings fall from heaven, I fix them fast,"—
 Simply "How good it were to fly and rest, 995
 "Have hope now, and one day expect content!
 "How well to do what I shall never do!"
 So I said "Had there been a man like that,
 "To lift me with his strength out of all strife
 "Into the calm, how I could fly and rest! 1000
 "I have a keeper in the garden here
 "Whose sole employment is to strike me low
 "If ever I, for solace, seek the sun.
 "Life means with me successful feigning death,
 "Lying stone-like, eluding notice so, 1005
 "Forgoing here the turf and there the sky.
 "Suppose that man had been instead of this!"

Presently Conti laughed into my ear,
 —Had tripped up to the raised place where I sat—
 "Cousin, I flung them brutishly and hard! 1010
 "Because you must be hurt, to look austere
 "As Caponsacchi yonder, my tall friend
 "A-gazing now. Ah, Guido, you so close?
 "Keep on your knees, do! Beg her to forgive!
 "My cornet battered like a cannon-ball. 1015
 "Good-bye, I'm gone!"—nor waited the reply.

That night at supper, out my husband broke,
 "Why was that throwing, that buffoonery?
 "Do you think I am your dupe? What man would
 dare
 "Throw comfits in a stranger lady's lap? 1020
 "'T was knowledge of you bred such insolence
 "In Caponsacchi; he dared shoot the bolt,
 "Using that Conti for his stalking-horse.

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK VII

"How could you see him this once and no more,
 "When he is always haunting hereabout 1025
 "At the street-corner or the palace-side,
 "Publishing my shame and your impudence?
 "You are a wanton,—I a dupe, you think?
 "O Christ, what hinders that I kill her quick?"
 Whereat he drew his sword and feigned a thrust. 1030

All this, now,—being not so strange to me,
 Used to such misconception day by day
 And broken-in to bear,—I bore, this time,
 More quietly than woman should perhaps;
 Repeated the mere truth and held my tongue. 1035

Then he said, "Since you play the ignorant,
 "I shall instruct you. This amour,—commenced
 "Or finished or midway in act, all 's one, --
 "'T is the town-talk; so my revenge shall be.
 "Does he presume because he is a priest? 1040
 "I warn him that the sword I wear shall pink
 "His lily-scented cassock through and through,
 "Next time I catch him underneath your eaves!"
 But he had threatened with the sword so oft
 And, after all, not kept his promise. All 1045
 I said was "Let God save the innocent!"
 "Moreover death is far from a bad fate.
 "I shall go pray for you and me, not him;
 "And then I look to sleep, come death or, worse,
 "Life." So, I slept. 1050

There may have elapsed a week,
 When Margherita, —called my waiting-maid,
 Whom it is said my husband found too fair—
 Who stood and heard the charge and the reply,
 Who never once would let the matter rest 1055
 From that night forward, but rang changes still

On this the thrust and that the shame, and how
 Good cause for jealousy cures jealous fools,
 And what a paragon was this same priest
 She talked about until I stopped my ears, — 1060
 She said, "A week is gone ; you comb your hair,
 " Then go mope in a corner, cheek on palm,
 " Till night comes round again, - so, waste a week
 " As if your husband menaced you in sport.
 " Have not I some acquaintance with his tricks ? 1065
 " Oh no, he did not stab the serving-man
 " Who made and sang the rhymes about me
 once !
 " For why ? They sent him to the wars next day.
 " Nor poisoned he the foreigner, my friend
 " Who w. gered on the whiteness of my breast, — 1070
 " The swarth skins of our city in dispute :
 " For, though he paid me proper compliment,
 " The Count well knew he was besotted with
 " Somebody else, a skin as black as ink,
 " (As all the town knew save my foreigner) 1075
 " He found and wedded presently, — ' Why need
 " ' Better revenge ? ' — the Count asked. But what's
 here ?
 " A priest that does not fight, and cannot wed,
 " Yet must be dealt with ! If the Count took fire
 " For the poor pastime of a minute, — me — 1080
 " What were the conflagration for yourself,
 " Countess and lady-wife and all the rest ?
 " The priest will perish ; you will grieve too late :
 " So shall the city-ladies' handsomest
 " Frankest and liberalest gentleman 1085
 " Die for you, to appease a scurvy dog
 " Hanging 's too good for. Is there no escape ?
 " Were it not simple Christian charity
 " To warn the priest be on his guard, — save him
 " Assured death, save yourself from causing it ? 1090

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK VII

"I meet him in the street. Give me a glove,
"A ring to show for token! Mum 's the word!"

I answered "If you were, as styled, my maid,
"I would command you : as you are, you say,
"My husband's intimate,—assist his wife 1105
"Who can do nothing but entreat 'Be still!'
"Even if you speak truth and a crime is planned,
"Leave help to God as I am forced to do!
"There is no other help, or we should craze,
"Seeing such evil with no human cure. 1110
"Reflect that God, who makes the storm desist,
"Can make an angry violent heart subside.
"Why should we venture teach Him governance?
"Never address me on this subject more!"

Next night she said "But I went, all the same, 1115
"—Ay, saw your Caponsacchi in his house,
"And come back stuffed with news I must out-
pour.

"I told him 'Sir, my mistress is a stone :
" 'Why should you harm her for no good you get?
" 'For you do harm her— prowl about our place 1120
" 'With the Count never distant half the street,
" 'Lurking at every corner, would you look !
" 'T is certain she has witched you with a spell.
" 'Are there not other beauties at your beck?
" 'We all know, Donna This and Monna That 1125
" 'Die for a glance of yours, yet here you gaze !
" 'Go make them grateful, leave the stone its
cold !'

"And he—oh, he turned first white and then red,
"And then—"To her behest I bow myself,
" 'Whom I love with my body and my soul : 1130
" 'Only a word !' the bowing ! See, I write
" 'One little word, no harm to see or hear !
" 'Then, fear no further!' This is what he wrote.

"I know you cannot read,—therefore, let me !

"*'My idol !'*" . . .

1125

But I took it from her hand
And tore it into shreds. "Why join the rest

"Who harm me ? Have I ever done you wrong ?

"People have told me 't is you wrong myself :

"Let it suffice I either feel no wrong

1130

"Or else forgive it,—yet you turn my foe !

"The others hunt me and you throw a noose !"

She muttered "Have your wilful way !" I slept.

Whereupon . . . no, I leave my husband out !

It is not to do him more hurt, I speak.

1135

Let it suffice, when misery was most,

One day, I swooned and got a respite so.

She stooped as I was slowly coming to,

This Margherita, ever on my trace,

And whispered—"Caponsacchi !"

1140

If I drowned,
But woke afloat i' the wave with upturned eyes,

And found their first sight was a star ! I turned—

For the first time, I let her have her will,

Heard passively,—*"The imposthume at such head,*

1145

"One touch, one lancet-puncture would relieve,—

"And still no glance the good physician's way

"Who rids you of the torment in a trice !

"Still he writes letters you refuse to hear.

"He may prevent your husband, kill himself,

1150

"So desperate and all fordone is he !

"Just hear the pretty verse he made to-day !

"A sonnet from Mirtillo. 'Peerless fair . . .'

"All poetry is difficult to read,

"—The sense of it is, anyhow, he seeks

1155

"Leave to contrive you an escape from hell,

"And for that purpose asks an interview.

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK VII

"I can write, I can grant it in your name,
 "Or, what is better, lead you to his house.
 "Your husband dashes you against the stones ; 1160
 "This man would place each fragment in a shrine :
 "You hate him, love your husband !"

I returned

"It is not true I love my husband, —no,
 "Nor hate this man. I listen while you speak, 1165
 "—Assured that what you say is false, the same :
 "Much as when once, to me a little child,
 "A rough gaunt man in rags, with eyes on fire,
 "A crowd of boys and idlers at his heels,
 "Rushed as I crossed the Square, and held my
 head 1170

"In his two hands, 'Here 's she will let me speak!
 "'You little girl, whose eyes do good to mine,
 "'I am the Pope, am Sextus, now the Sixth ;
 "'And that Twelfth Innocent, proclaimed to-day,
 "'Is Lucifer disguised in human flesh ! 1175
 "'The angels, met in conclave, crowned me !'—
 thus

"He gibbered and I listened ; but I knew
 "All was delusion, ere folk interposed
 "'Unfasten him, the maniac !' Thus I know
 "All your report of Caponsacchi false, 1180
 "Folly or dreaming ; I have seen so much
 "By that adventure at the spectacle,
 "The face I fronted that one first, last time :
 "He would belie it by such words and thoughts.
 "Therefore while you profess to show him me, 1185
 "I ever see his own face. Get you gone !"

"—That wil' I, nor once open mouth again,—
 "No, by Saint Joseph and the Holy Ghost !
 "On your head be the damage, so adieu !"

And so more days, more deeds I must forget, 1170
 Till . . . what a strange thing now is to declare !
 Since I say anything, say all if true !
 And how my life seems lengthened as to serve !
 It may be idle or inopportune,
 But, true ?—why, what was all I said but truth, 1195
 Even when I found that such as are untrue
 Could only take the truth in through a lie ?
 Now I am speaking truth to the Truth's self :
 God will lend credit to my words this time.

It had got half through April. I arose 1200
 One vivid daybreak,—who had gone to bed
 In the old way my wont those last three years,
 Careless until, the cup drained, I should die.
 The last sound in my ear, the over-night,
 Had been a something let drop on the sly 1205
 In prattle by Margherita, "Soon enough
 "Gaieties end, now Easter's past : a week,
 "And the Archbishop gets him back to Rome,—
 "Everyone leaves the town for Rome, this
 Spring,—
 "Even Caponsacchi, out of heart and hope, 1210
 "Resigns himself and follows with the flock."
 I heard this drop and drop like rain outside
 Fast-falling through the darkness while she spoke :
 So had I heard with like indifference,
 "And Michael's pair of wings will arrive first 1215
 "At Rome, to introduce the company,
 "And bear him from our picture where he fights
 "Satan,—expect to have that dragon loose
 "And never a defender !"—my sole thought
 Being still, as night came, "Done, another day ! 1220
 "How good to sleep and so get nearer death !"—
 When, what, first thing at daybreak, pierced the
 sleep

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK VII

With a summons to me? Up I sprang alive,
 Light in me, light without me, everywhere
 Change! A broad yellow sunbeam was let fall 1225
 From heaven to earth, —a sudden drawbridge lay,
 Along which marched a myriad merry motes,
 Mocking the flies that crossed them and recrossed
 In rival dance, companions new-born too.
 On the house-eaves, a dripping shag of weed 1230
 Shook diamonds on each dull grey lattice-square,
 As first one, then another bird leapt by,
 And light was off, and lo was back again,
 Always with one voice,—where are two such
 joys?—
 The blessed building-sparrow! I stepped forth, 1235
 Stood on the terrace,—o'er the roofs, such sky!
 My heart sang, "I too am to go away,
 "I too have something I must care about,
 "Carry away with me to Rome, to Rome!
 "The bird brings hither sticks and hairs and wool, 1240
 "And nowhere else i' the world; what fly breaks
 rank,
 "Falls out of the procession that befits,
 "From window here to window there, with all
 "The world to choose,—so well he knows his
 course?
 "I have my purpose and my motive too, 1245
 "My march to Rome, like any bird or fly!
 "Had I been dead! How right to be alive!
 "Last night I almost prayed for leave to die,
 "Wished Guido all his pleasure with the sword
 "Or the poison,—poison, sword, was but a trick, 1250
 "Harmless, may God forgive him the poor jest!
 "My life is charmed, will last till I reach Rome!
 "Yesterday, but for the sin,—ah, nameless be
 "The deed I could have dared against myself!
 "Now—see if I will touch an unripe fruit 1255

"And risk the health I want to have and use !
 "Not to live, now, would be the wickedness,—
 "For life means to make haste and go to Rome
 "And leave Arezzo, leave all woes at once !"

Now, understand here, by no means mistake ! 1260
 Long ago had I tried to leave that house
 When it seemed such procedure would stop sin ;
 And still failed more the more I tried—at first
 The Archbishop, as I told you,—next, our lord
 The Governor,—indeed I found my way, 1265
 I went to the great palace where he rules,
 Though I knew well 't was he who,—when I gave
 A jewel or two, themselves had given me,
 Back to my parents,—since they wanted bread,
 They who had never let me want a nosegay,—he 1270
 Spoke of the jail for felons, if they kept
 What was first theirs, then mine, so doubly theirs,
 Though all the while my husband's most of all !
 I knew well who had spoke the word wrought this :
 Yet, being in extremity, I fled 1275
 To the Governor, as I say, - scarce opened lip
 When—the cold cruel snicker close behind—
 Guido was on my trace, already there,
 Exchanging nod and wink for shrug and smile,
 And I—pushed back to him and, for my pains 1280
 Paid with . . . but why remember what is past ?
 I sought out a poor friar the people call
 The Roman, and confessed my sin which came
 Of their sin,—that fact could not be repressed,—
 The frightfulness of my despair in God : 1285
 And, feeling, through the grate, his horror shake,
 Implored him, "Write for me who cannot write,
 "Apprise my parents, make them rescue me !
 "You bid me be courageous and trust God :
 "Do you in turn dare somewhat, trust and write 1290

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK VII

" " Dear friends, who used to be my parents once,
 " " And now declare you have no part in me,
 " " This is some riddle I want wit to solve,
 " " Since you must love me with no difference.
 " " Even suppose you altered,—there 's your hate, 1295
 " " To ask for : hate of you two dearest ones
 " " I shall find liker love than love found here,
 " " If husbands love their wives. Take me away
 " " And hate me as you do the gnats and fleas,
 " " Even the scorpions ! How I shall rejoice !' 1300
 " Write that and save me ! " And he promised—
 wrote

Or did not write ; things never changed at all :
 He was not like the Augustinian here !
 Last, in a desperation I appealed
 To friends, whoever wished me better days, 1305
 To Guillichini, that 's of kin,—“ What, I—
 “ Travel to Rome with you ? A flying gout
 “ Bids me deny my heart and mind my leg ! ”
 Then I tried Conti, used to brave—laugh back
 The louring thunder when his cousin scowled 1310
 At me protected by his presence : “ You—
 “ Who well know what you cannot save me
 from, —
 “ Carry me off ! What frightens you, a priest ? ”
 He shook his head, looked grave— “ Above my
 strength !
 “ Guido has claws that scratch, shows feline teeth ; 1315
 “ A formidabler foe than I dare fret :
 “ Give me a dog to deal with, twice the size !
 “ Of course I am a priest and Canon too,
 “ But . . . by the bye . . . though both, not quite
 so bold
 “ As he, my fellow-Canon, brother-priest, 1320
 “ The personage in such ill odour here
 “ Because of the reports pure birth o' the brain !

"Our Caponsacchi, he 's your true Saint George
 "To slay the monster, set the Princess free,
 "And have the whole High-Altar to himself: 1325
 "I always think so when I see that piece
 "I' the Pieve, that 's his church and mine, you
 know :
 "Though you drop eyes at mention of his name!"

The name had got to take a half-grotesque
 Half-ominous, wholly enigmatic sense, 1330
 Like any by-word, broken bit of song
 Born with a meaning, changed by mouth and
 mouth
 That mix it in a sneer or smile, as chance
 Bids, till it now means nought but ugliness
 And perhaps shame. 1335

—All this intends to say,
 That, over-night, the notion of escape
 Had seemed distemper, dreaming; and the
 name,—
 Not the man, but the name of him, thus made
 Into a mockery and disgrace,—why, she 1340
 Who uttered it persistently, had laughed,
 "I name his name, and there you start and wince
 "As criminal from the red tongs' touch!"—yet
 now,
 Now, as I stood letting morn bathe me bright,
 Choosing which butterfly should bear my news,— 1345
 The white, the brown one, or that tinier blue,—
 The Margherita, I detested so,
 In she came—"The fine day, the good Spring
 time!
 "What, up and out at window? That is best.
 "No thought of Caponsacchi?—who stood there 1350
 "All night on one leg, like the sentry crane,

"Under the pelting of your water-spout—
 "Looked last look at your lattice ere he leave
 "Our city, bury his dead hope at Rome.
 "Ay, go to looking-glass and make you fine, 1355
 "While he may die ere touch one least loose
 hair
 "You drag at with the comb in such a rage!"

I turned-- "Tell Caponsacchi he may come!"

"Tell him to come? Ah, but, for charity,
 "A truce to fooling! Come? What, come 1360
 this eve?
 "Peter and Paul! But I see through the trick!
 "Yes, come, and take a flower-pot on his head,
 "Flung from your terrace! No joke, sincere
 truth?"

How plainly I perceived hell flash and fade
 O' the face of her,—the doubt that first paled joy, 1365
 Then, final reassurance I indeed
 Was caught now, never to be free again!
 What did I care? —who felt myself of force
 To play with silk, and spurn the horsehair-springe.

"But—do you know that I have bade him come, 1370
 "And in your own name? I presumed so much,
 "Knowing the thing you needed in your heart.
 "But somehow—what had I to show in proof?
 "He would not come: half-promised, that was all,
 "And wrote the letters you refused to read. 1375
 "What is the message that shall move him now?"

"After the Ave Maria, at first dark,
 "I will be standing on the terrace, say!"

"I would I had a good long lock of hair
"Should prove I was not lying! Never mind!" 1330

Off she went— "May he not refuse, that 's all—
"Fearing a trick!"

I answered, "He will come."
And, all day, I sent prayer like incense up
To God the strong, God the beneficent, 1335
God ever mindful in all strife and strait,
Who, for our own good, makes the need extreme,
Till at the last He puts forth might and saves.
An old rhyme came into my head and rang
Of how a virgin, for the faith of God, 1340
Hid herself, from the Paynims that pursued,
In a cave's heart; until a thunderstone,
Wrapped in a flame, revealed the couch and prey:
And they laughed—"Thanks to lightning, ours
at last!"

And she cried "Wrath of God, assert His love! 1395
"Servant of God, thou fire, befriend His child!"
And lo, the fire she grasped at, fixed its flash,
Lay in her hand a calm cold dreadful sword
She brandished till pursuers strewed the ground,
So did the souls within them die away, 1400
As o'er the prostrate bodies, sworded, safe,
She walked forth to the solitudes and Christ:
So should I grasp the lightning and be saved!

And still, as the day wore, the trouble grew
Whereby I guessed there would be born a star, 1405
Until at an intense throe of the dusk,
I started up, was pushed, I dare to say,
Out on the terrace, leaned and looked at last
Where the deliverer waited me: the same
Silent and solemn face, I first descried 1410
At the spectacle, confronted mine once more.

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK VII

So was that minute twice vouchsafed me, so
The manhood, wasted then, was still at watch
To save me yet a second time : no change
Here, though all else changed in the changing
world !

1415

I spoke on the instant, as my duty bade,
In some such sense as this, whatever the phrase.

“ Friend, foolish words were borne from you to me ;
“ Your soul behind them is the pure strong wind,
“ Not dust and feathers which its breath may bear : 1420
“ These to the witless seem the wind itself,
“ Since proving thus the first of it they feel.
“ If by mischance you blew offence my way,
“ The straws are dropt, the wind desists no whit,
“ And how such strays were caught up in the
street

1425

“ And took a motion from you, why inquire ?
“ I speak to the strong soul, no weak disguise.
“ If it be truth,—why should I doubt it truth ?—
“ You serve God specially, as priests are bound,
“ And care about me, stranger as I am, 1430
“ So far as wish my good,—that miracle
“ I take to intimate He wills you serve
“ By saving me,—what else can He direct ?
“ Here is the service. Since a long while now,
“ I am in course of being put to death : 1435
“ While death concerned nothing but me, I bowed
“ The head and bade, in heart, my husband strike.
“ Now I imperil something more, it seems,
“ Something that ’s truelier me than this myself,
“ Something I trust in God and you to save. 1440
“ You go to Rome, they tell me : take me there,
“ Put me back with my people ! ”

He replied—
The first word I heard ever from his lips,
All himself in it,—an eternity
Of speech, to match the immeasurable depth 1445
O' the soul that then broke silence—"I am yours."

So did the star rise, soon to lead my step,
Lead on, nor pause before it should stand still
Above the House o' the Babe,—my babe to be, 1450
That knew me first and thus made me know him,
That had his right of life and claim on mine,
And would not let me die till he was born,
But pricked me at the heart to save us both,
Saying "Have you the will? Leave God the way!" 1455
And the way was Caponsacchi—"mine," thank
God!

He was mine, he is mine, he will be mine.

No pause i' the leading and the light! I know,
Next night there was a cloud came, and not he :
But I prayed through the darkness till it broke 1460
And let him shine. The second night, he came.

"The plan is rash ; the project desperate :
"In such a flight needs must I risk your life,
"Give food for falsehood, folly or mistake,
"Ground for your husband's rancour and re-
venge"— 1465

So he began again, with the same face.
I felt that, the same loyalty—one star
Turning now red that was so white before—
One service apprehended newly : just
A word of mine and there the white was back ! 1470

"No, friend, for you will take me ! 'T is yourself
"Risk all, not I,—who let you, for I trust

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK VII

"In the compensating great God : enough !

"I know you : when is it that you will come ?"

"To-morrow at the day's dawn." Then I heard

What I should do : how to prepare for flight 1475

And where to fly.

That night my husband bade

"—You, whom I loathe, beware you break my sleep

"This whole night ! Couch beside me like the
corpse 1480

"I would you were !" The rest you know, I think—

How I found Caponsacchi and escaped.

And this man, men call sinner ? Jesus Christ !

Of whom men said, with mouths Thyself mad'st
once,

"He hath a devil"—say he was Thy saint, 1485

My Caponsacchi ! Shield and show—unshroud

In Thine own time the glory of the soul

If aught obscure,—if ink-spot, from vile pens

Scribbling a charge against him—(I was glad

Then, for the first time, that I could not write)— 1490

Flirted his way, have flecked the blaze !

For me,

'T is otherwise : let men take, sift my thoughts

—Thoughts I throw like the flax for sun to bleach !

I did pray, do pray, in the prayer shall die, 1495

"Oh, to have Caponsacchi for my guide !"

Ever the face upturned to mine, the hand

Holding my hand across the world,—a sense

That reads, as only such can read, the mark

God sets on woman, signifying so 1500

She should—shall peradventure—be divine ;

Yet 'ware, the while, how weakness mars the print

And makes confusion, leaves the thing men see,

—Not this man sees,—who from his soul, re-writes
 The obliterated charter,—love and strength 1505
 Mending what 's marred. “So kneels a votarist,
 “Weeds some poor waste traditionary plot
 “Where shrine once was, where temple yet may be,
 “Purging the place but worshipping the while,
 “By faith and not by sight, sight clearest so,— 1510
 “Such way the saints work,” —says Don Celestine.
 But I, not privileged to see a saint
 Of old when such walked earth with crown and palm,
 If I call “saint” what saints call something else—
 The saints must bear with me, impute the fault 1515
 To a soul i' the bud, so starved by ignorance,
 Stinted of warmth, it will not blow this year
 Nor recognize the orb which Spring-flowers know.
 But if meanwhile some insect with a heart
 Worth floods of lazy music, spendthrift joy— 1520
 Some fire-fly renounced Spring for my dwarfed cup,
 Crept close to me, brought lustre for the dark,
 Comfort against the cold,—what though excess
 Of comfort should miscall the creature—sun?
 What did the sun to hinder while harsh hands 1525
 Petal by petal, crude and colourless,
 Tore me? This one heart gave me all the Spring!

Is all told? There 's the journey: and where 's time
 To tell you how that heart burst out in shine?
 Yet certain points do press on me too hard. 1530
 Each place must have a name, though I forget:
 How strange it was—there where the plain begins
 And the small river mitigates its flow—
 When eve was fading fast, and my soul sank,
 And he divined what surge of bitterness, 1535
 In overtaking me, would float me back
 Whence I was carried by the striding day—
 So,—“This grey place was famous once,” said he—

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK VII

And he began that legend of the place
 As if in answer to the unspoken fear, 1540
 And told me all about a brave man dead,
 Which lifted me and let my soul go on !
 How did he know too,—at that town's approach
 By the rock-side,—that in coming near the signs
 Of life, the house-roofs and the church and tower, 1545
 I saw the old boundary and wall o' the world
 Rise plain as ever round me, hard and cold,
 As if the broken circlet joined again,
 Tightened itself about me with no break,—
 As if the town would turn Arezzo's self,— 1550
 The husband there,—the friends my enemies,
 All ranged against me, not an avenue
 To try, but would be blocked and drive me back
 On him,—this other, . . . oh the heart in that !
 Did not he find, bring, put into my arms 1555
 A new-born babe ?—and I saw faces beam
 Of the young mother proud to teach me joy,
 And gossips round expecting my surprise
 At the sudden hole through earth that lets in
 heaven.
 I could believe himself by his strong will 1560
 Had woven around me what I thought the world
 We went along in, every circumstance,
 Towns, flowers and faces, all things helped so well !
 For, through the journey, was it natural
 Such comfort should arise from first to last ? 1565
 As I look back, all is one milky way ;
 Still bettered more, the more remembered, so
 Do new stars bud while I but search for old,
 And fill all gaps i' the glory, and grow him—
 Him I now see make the shine everywhere. 1570
 Even at the last when the bewildered flesh,
 The cloud of weariness about my soul
 Clogging too heavily, sucked down all sense,—

Still its last voice was, "He will watch and care ;
 "Let the strength go, I am content : he stays !" 1575

I doubt not he did stay and care for all—
 From that sick minute when the head swam round,
 And the eyes looked their last and died on him,
 As in his arms he caught me, and, you say,
 Carried me in, that tragical red eve, 1580

And laid me where I next returned to life
 In the other red of morning, two red plates
 That crushed together, crushed the time between,
 And are since then a solid fire to me,—

When in, my dreadful husband and the world 1585
 Broke,—and I saw him, master, by hell's right,
 And saw my angel helplessly held back

By guards that helped the malice—the lamb prone,
 The serpent towering and triumphant—then
 Came all the strength back in a sudden swell, 1590
 I did for once see right, do right, give tongue
 The adequate protest : for a worm must turn
 If it would have its wrong observed by God.

I did spring up, attempt to thrust aside
 That ice-block 'twixt the sun and me, lay low 1595
 The neutralizer of all good and truth.

If I sinned so,—never obey voice more
 O' the Just and Terrible, who bids us—"Bear !"
 Not—"Stand by, bear to see my angels bear !"
 I am clear it was on impulse to serve God 1600

Not save myself,—no—nor my child unborn !
 Had I else waited patiently till now?—
 Who saw my old kind parents, silly-sooth
 And too much trustful, for their worst of faults,
 Cheated, brow-beaten, stripped and starved, cast
 out 1605

Into the kennel : I remonstrated,
 Then sank to silence, for,—their woes at end,
 Themselves gone,—only I was left to plague.

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If only I was threatened and belied,
 What matter? I could bear it and did bear ; 1610
 It was a comfort, still one lot for all :
 They were not persecuted for my sake
 And I, estranged, the single happy one.
 But when at last, all by myself I stood
 Obeying the clear voice which bade me rise, 1615
 Not for my own sake but my babe unborn,
 And take the angel's hand was sent to help—
 And found the old adversary athwart the path—
 Not my hand simply struck from the angel's, but
 The very angel's self made foul i' the face 1620
 By the fiend who struck there,—that I would not
 bear,
 That only I resisted ! So, my first
 And last resistance was invincible.
 Prayers move God ; threats, and nothing else, move
 men !
 I must have prayed a man as he were God 1625
 When I implored the Governor to right
 My parents' wrongs : the answer was a smile.
 The Archbishop,—did I clasp his feet enough,
 Hide my face hotly on them, while I told
 More than I dared make my own mother know ? 1630
 The profit was—compassion and a jest.
 This time, the foolish prayers were done with, right
 Used might, and solemnized the sport at once.
 All was against the combat : vantage, mine ?
 The runaway avowed, the accomplice-wife, 1635
 In company with the plan-contriving priest ?
 Yet, shame thus rank and patent, I struck, bare,
 At foe from head to foot in magic mail,
 And off it withered, cobweb-armoury
 Against the lightning ! 'T was truth singed the
 lies 1640
 And saved me, not the vain sword nor weak speech !

You see, I will not have the service fail !
I say, the angel saved me : I am safe !
Others may want and wish, I wish nor want
One point o' the circle plainer, where I stand 1645
Traced round about with white to front the world.
What of the calumny I came across,
What o' the way to the end ?—the end crowns all.
The judges judged aright i' the main, gave me
The uttermost of my heart's desire, a truce 1650
From torture and Arezzo, balm for hurt,
With the quiet nuns,—God recompense the good !
Who said and sang away the ugly past.
And, when my final fortune was revealed,
What safety while, amid my parents' arms, 1655
My babe was given me ! Yes, he saved my babe :
It would not have peeped forth, the bird-like thing,
Through that Arezzo noise and trouble : back
Had it returned nor ever let me see !
But the sweet peace cured all, and let me live 1660
And give my bird the life among the leaves
God meant him ! Weeks and months of quietude,
I could lie in such peace and learn so much—
Begin the task, I see how needful now,
Of understanding somewhat of my past,— 1665
Know life a little, I should leave so soon.
Therefore, because this man restored my soul,
All has been right ; I have gained my gain, enjoyed
As well as suffered,—nay, got foretaste too
Of better life beginning where this ends— 1670
All through the breathing-while allowed me thus,
Which let good premonitions reach my soul
Unthwarted, and benignant influence flow
And interpenetrate and change my heart,
Uncrossed by what was wicked,—nay, unkind. 1675
For, as the weakness of my time drew nigh,
Nobody did me one disservice more,

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK VII

Spoke coldly or looked strangely, broke the love
 I lay in the arms of, till my boy was born,
 Born all in love, with nought to spoil the bliss 1680
 A whole long fortnight : in a life like mine
 A fortnight filled with bliss is long and much.
 All women are not mothers of a boy,
 Though they live twice the length of my whole life,
 And, as they fancy, happily all the same. 1685
 There I lay, then, all my great fortnight long,
 As if it would continue, broaden out
 Happily more and more, and lead to heaven :
 Christmas before me,—was not that a chance ?
 I never realized God's birth before— 1690
 How He grew likest God in being born.
 This time I felt like Mary, had my babe
 Lying a little on my breast like hers.
 So all went on till, just four days ago—
 The night and the tap. 1695

Oh it shall be success

To the whole of our poor family ! My friends
 . . . Nay, father and mother,—give me back my
 word !
 They have been rudely stripped of life, disgraced
 Like children who must needs go clothed too fine, 1700
 Carry the garb of Carnival in Lent.
 If they too much affected frippery,
 They have been punished and submit themselves,
 Say no word : all is over, they see God
 Who will not be extreme to mark their fault 1705
 Or He had granted respite : they are safe.

For that most woeful man my husband once,
 Who, needing respite, still draws vital breath,
 I—pardon him ? So far as lies in me,
 I give him for his good the life he takes, 1710

Praying the world will therefore acquiesce.
Let him make God amends,—none, none to me
Who thank him rather that, whereas strange fate
Mockingly styled him husband and me wife,
Himself this way at least pronounced divorce, 1715
Blotted the marriage-bond : this blood of mine
Flies forth exultingly at any door,
Washes the parchment white, and thanks the blow.
We shall not meet in this world nor the next,
But where will God be absent ? In His face 1720
Is light, but in His shadow healing too :
Let Guido touch the shadow and be healed !
And as my presence was importunate,—
My earthly good, temptation and a snare,—
Nothing about me but drew somehow down 1725
His hate upon me,—somewhat so excused
Therefore, since hate was thus the truth of him,—
May my evanishment for evermore
Help further to relieve the heart that cast
Such object of its natural loathing forth ! 1730
So he was made ; he nowise made himself :
I could not love him, but his mother did.
His soul has never lain beside my soul :
But for the unresisting body,—thanks !
He burned that garment spotted by the flesh. 1735
Whatever he touched is rightly ruined : plague
It caught, and disinfection it had craved
Still but for Guido ; I am saved through him
So as by fire ; to him—thanks and farewell !

Even for my babe, my boy, there 's safety thence— 1740
From the sudden death of me, I mean : we poor
Weak souls, how we endeavour to be strong !
I was already using up my life,—
This portion, now, should do him such a good,
This other go to keep off such an ill ! 1745

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK VII

The great life ; see, a breath and it is gone !
So is detached, so left all by itself
The little life, the fact which means so much.
Shall not God stoop the kindlier to His work,
His marvel of creation, foot would crush, 1750
Now that the hand He trusted to receive
And hold it, lets the treasure fall perforce ?
The better ; He shall have in orphanage
His own way all the clearer : if my babe
Outlived the hour—and he has lived two weeks— 1755
It is through God who knows I am not by.
Who is it makes the soft gold hair turn black,
And sets the tongue, might lie so long at rest,
Trying to talk ? Let us leave God alone !
Why should I doubt He will explain in time 1760
What I feel now, but fail to find the words ?
My babe nor was, nor is, nor yet shall be
Count Guido Franceschini's child at all—
Only his mother's, born of love not hate !
So shall I have my rights in after-time. 1765
It seems absurd, impossible to-day ;
So seems so much else, not explained but known !

Ah! Friends, I thank and bless you every one!
No more now : I withdraw from earth and man
To my own soul, compose myself for God. 1770

Well, and there is more ! Yes, my end of breath
Shall bear away my soul in being true !
He is still here, not outside with the world,
Here, here, I have him in his rightful place !
'T is now, when I am most upon the move, 1775
I feel for what I verily find—again
The face, again the eyes, again, through all,
The heart and its immeasurable love
Of my one friend, my only, all my own,

Who put his breast between the spears and me. 1780
 Ever with Caponsacchi ! Otherwise
 Here alone would be failure, loss to me—
 How much more loss to him, with life debarred
 From giving life, love locked from love's display,
 The day-star stopped its task that makes night
 morn ! 1785

O lover of my life, O soldier-saint,
 No work begun shall ever pause for death !
 Love will be helpful to me more and more
 I' the coming course, the new path I must tread—
 My weak hand in thy strong hand, strong for that ! 1790
 Tell him that if I seem without him now,
 That 's the world's insight ! Oh, he understands !
 He is at Civi'a do I once doubt
 The world again is holding us apart ?
 He had been here, displayed in my behalf 1795
 The broad brow that reverberates the truth,
 And flashed the word God gave him, back to man !
 I know where the free soul is flown ! My fate
 Will have been hard for even him to bear :
 Let it confirm him in the trust of God, 1800
 Showing how holily he dared the deed !
 And, for the rest, -say, from the deed, no touch
 Of harm came, but all good, all happiness,
 Not one faint fleck of failure ! Why explain ?
 What I see, oh, he sees and how much more ! 1805
 Tell him,—I know not wherefore the true word
 Should fade and fall unuttered at the last—
 It was the name of him I sprang to meet
 When came the knock, the summons and the end.
 " My great heart, my strong hand are back again ! " 1810
 I would have sprung to these, beckoning across
 Murder and hell gigantic and distinct
 O' the threshold, posted to exclude me heaven :
 He is ordained to call and I to come !

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK VII

Do not the dead wear flowers when dressed for
God ?

1815

Say,—I am all in flowers from head to foot !

Say,—not one flower of all he said and did,

Might seem to flit unnoticed, fade unknown,

But dropped a seed, has grown a balsam-tree

Whereof the blossoming perfumes the place

1820

At this supreme of moments ! He is a priest ;

He cannot marry therefore, which is right :

I think he would not marry if he could.

Marriage on earth seems such a counterfeit,

Mere imitation of the inimitable :

1825

In heaven we have the real and true and sure.

'T is there they neither marry nor are given

In marriage but are as the angels : right,

Oh how right that is, how like Jesus Christ

To say that ! Marriage-making for the earth,

1830

With gold so much,—birth, power, repute so much,

Or beauty, youth so much, in lack of these !

Be as the angels rather, who, apart,

Know themselves into one, are found at length

Married, but marry never, no, nor give

1835

In marriage ; they are man and wife at once

When the true time is : here we have to wait

Not so long neither ! Could we by a wish

Have what we will and get the future now,

Would we wish aught done undone in the past ?

1840

So, let him wait God's instant men call years ;

Meantime hold hard by truth and his great soul,

Do out the duty ! Through such souls alone

God stooping shows sufficient of His light

For us i' the dark to rise by. And I rise.

1845

VIII.—DOMINUS HYACINTHUS DE ARCHANGELIS

PAUPERUM PROCURATOR

AlI, my Giacinto, he 's no ruddy rogue,
Is not Cinone? What, to-day we 're eight?
Seven and one 's eight, I hope, old curly-pate!
—Branches me out his verb-tree on the slate,
Amo -as ari -atum -are -ans, 5
Up to *-aturus*, person, tense, and mood,
Quies me *cum subjunctivo* (I could cry)
And chews Corderius with his morning crust!
Look eight years onward, and he 's perched, he 's
perched
Dapper and deft on stool beside this chair, 10
Cinozzo, Cinoncello, who but he?
—Trying his milk-teeth on some crusty case
Like this, papa shall triturate full soon
To smooth Papinianian pulp!
It trots 15
Already through my head, though noon be now,
Does supper-time and what belongs to eve.
Dispose, O Don, o' the day, first work then play!
—The proverb bids. And "then" means, won't
we hold
Our little yearly lovesome frolic feast, 20
Cinuolo's birth-night, Cinicello's own,
That makes gruff January grin perforce!
For too contagious grows the birth, the warmth

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK VIII

Escaping from so many hearts at once—
 When the good wife, buxom and bonny yet, 25
 Jokes the hale grandsire,—such are just the sort
 To go off suddenly,—he who hides the key
 O' the box beneath his pillow every night,—
 Which box may hold a parchment (someone
 thinks)

Will show a scribbled something like a name 30
 “Cinino, Ciniccino,” near the end,
 “To whom I give and I bequeath my lands,
 “Estates, tenements, hereditaments,
 “When I decease as honest grandsire ought.”
 Wherefore—yet this one time again perhaps— 35
 Shan't my Orvieto fuddle his old nose !
 Then, uncles, one or the other, well i' the world,
 May—drop in, merely?—trudge through rain and
 wind,

Rather ! The smell-feasts rouse them at the hint
 There 's cookery in a certain dwelling-place ! 40
 Gossips, too, each with keepsake in his poke,
 Will pick the way, thrid lane by lantern-light,
 And so find door, put galligaskin off
 At entry of a decent domicile
 Cornered in snug Condotti,—all for love, 45
 All to crush cup with Cinucciatolo !

Well,

Let others climb the heights o' the court, the camp !
 How vain are chambering and wantonness,
 Revel and rout and pleasures that make mad ! 50
 Commend me to home-joy, the family board,
 Altar and hearth ! These, with a brisk career,
 A source of honest profit and good fame,
 Just so much work as keeps the brain from rust,
 Just so much play as lets the heart expand, 55
 Honouring God and serving man,—I say,
 These are reality, and all else,—fluff,

BOOK VIII DOMINUS HYACINTHUS

Nutshell and naught,—thank Flaccus for the
phrase!

Suppose I had been Fisc, yet bachelor!

Why, work with a will, then! Wherefore lazy now? 60
Turn up the hour-glass, whence no sand-grain slips
But should have done its duty to the saint
O' the day, the son and heir that 's eight years old!
Let law come dimple Cinoncino's cheek,
And Latin duple Cinarello's chin, 65
The while we spread him fine and toss him flat
This pulp that makes the pancake, trim our mass
Of matter into Argument the First,
Prime Pleading in defence of our accused,
Which, once a-waft on paper wing, shall soar, 70
Shall signalize before applaudive Rome
What study, and mayhap some mother-wit,
Can do toward making Master fop and Fisc
Old bachelor Bottinius bite his thumb.
Now, how good God is! How falls plumb to
point 75
This murder, gives me Guido to defend
Now, of all days i' the year, just when the boy
Verges on Virgil, reaches the right age
For some such illustration from his sire.
Stimulus to himself! One might wait years 80
And never find the chance which now finds me!
The fact is, there 's a blessing on the hearth,
A special providence for fatherhood!
Here 's a man, and what 's more, a noble, kills
—Not sneakingly but almost with parade— 85
Wife's father and wife's mother and wife's self
That 's mother's self of son and heir (like mine!)
—And here stand I, the favoured advocate,
Who pluck this flower o' the field, no Solomon
Was ever clothed in glorious gold to match, 90

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK VIII

And set the same in Cinoncino's cap !
 I defend Guido and his comrades—I !
 Pray God, I keep me humble : not to me—
Non nobis, Domine, sed tibi laus !
 How the fop chuckled when they made him Fisc ! 95
 We 'll beat you, my Bottinius, all for love,
 All for our tribute to Cinotto's day.
 Why, 'sbuddikins, old Innocent himself
 May rub his eyes at the bustle,—ask "What 's this
 "Rolling from out the rostrum, as a gust 100
 "O' the *Pro Milone* had been prisoned there,
 "And rattled Rome awake ?" Awaken Rome,
 How can the Pope doze on in decency ?
 He needs must wake up also, speak his word,
 Have his opinion like the rest of Rome, 105
 About this huge, this hurly-burly case :
 He wants who can excogitate the truth,
 Give the result in speech, plain black and white,
 To mumble in the mouth and make his own
 —A little changed, good man, a little changed ! 110
 No matter, so his gratitude be moved,
 By when my Giacinto gets of age,
 Mindful of who thus helped him at a pinch,
 Archangelus *Procurator Pauperum*—
 And proved Hortensius *Redivivus* ! 115
Whew !
 To earn the *Est-est*, merit the minced herb
 That mollifies the liver's leathery slice,
 With here a goose-foot, there a cock's-comb stuck,
 Cemented in an element of cheese ! 120
 I doubt if dainties do the grandsire good :
 Last June he had a sort of strangling . . . bah !
 He 's his own master, and his will is made.
 So, liver fizz, law flit and Latin fly
 As we rub hands o'er dish by way of grace ! 125
 May I lose cause if I vent one word more

BOOK VIII DOMINUS HYACINTHUS

Except,—with fresh-cut quill we ink the white,—
P-r-o-pro Guidone et Sociis. There !

Count Guido married—or, in Latin due,
 What ? *Duxit in uxorem ?*—commonplace ! 130
Tædas jugales iniiit, subiit,—ha !
 He underwent the matrimonial torch ?
Connubio stabili sibi junxit,—hum !
 In stable bond of marriage bound his own ?
 That 's clear of any modern taint : and yet . . . 135

Virgil is little help to who writes prose.
 He shall attack me Terence with the dawn,
 Shall Cinuccino ! Mum, mind business, Sir !
 Thus circumstantially evolve we facts,
Ita se habet idæo series facti : 140
 He wedded,—ah, with owls for augury !
Nupserrat, heu sinistris avibus,
 One of the blood Arezzo boasts her best,
Dominus Guido, nobili genere ortus,
Pompiliæ . . .

But the version afterward ! 145
 Curb we this ardour ! Notes alone, to-day,
 The speech to-morrow and the Latin last :
 Such was the rule in Farinacci's time.
 Indeed I hitched it into verse and good.
 Unluckily, law quite absorbs a man, 150
 Or else I think I too had poetized.
 " Law is the pork substratum of the fry,
 " Goose-foot and cock's-comb are Latinity,"—
 And in this case, if circumstance assist,
 We 'll garnish law with idiom, never fear ! 155
 Out-of-the-way events extend our scope :
 For instance, when Bottini brings his charge,
 " That letter which you say Pompilia wrote,—

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK VIII

"To criminate her parents and herself
 "And disengage her husband from the coil,— 160
 "That, Guido Franceschini wrote, say we :
 "Because Pompilia could nor read nor write,
 "Therefore he pencilled her such letter first,
 "Then made her trace in ink the same again."
 —Ha, my Bottini, have I thee on hip? 165
 How will he turn this and break Tully's pate?
 "*Existimandum*" (don't I hear the dog!)
 "*Quod Guido designaverit elementa*
 "*Dictæ epistolæ, quæ fuerint*
 "*(Superinducto ab ea calamo)* 170
 "*Notata atramento*"—there 's a style!—
 "*Quia ipsa scribere nesciebat.*" Boh!
 Now, my turn! Either, *Insulse!* (I outburst)
 Stupidly put! Inane is the response,
Inanis est responsio, or the like— 175
 To-wit, that each of all those characters,
Quod singula elementa epistolæ,
 Had first of all been traced for her by him,
Fuerant per eum prius designata,
 And then, the ink applied a-top of that, 180
Et deinde, superinducto calamo,
 The piece, she says, became her handiwork,
Per eam efformata, ut ipsa asserit.
 Inane were such response! (a second time :)
 Her husband outlined her the whole, forsooth? 185
Vir ejus lineabat epistolam?
 What, she confesses that she wrote the thing,
Fatetur eam scripsisse, (scorn that scathes!)
 That she might pay obedience to her lord?
Ut viro obtemperaret, apices 190
 (Here repeat charge with proper varied phrase)
Eo designante, ipsaque calamum
Super inducente? By such argument,
Ita pariter, she seeks to show the same,

BOOK VIII DOMINUS HYACINTHUS

(Ay, by Saint Joseph and what saints you please) 195

Epistolam ostendit, medius fidius,

No voluntary deed but fruit of force !

Non voluntarie sed coacte scriptam !

That 's the way to write Latin, friend my Fisc !

Bottini is a beast, one barbarous :

200

Look out for him when he attempts to say

" Armed with a pistol, Guido followed her ! "

Will not I be beforehand with my Fisc,

Cut away phrase by phrase from underfoot !

Guido Pompilium—Guido thus his wife

205

Following with igneous engine, shall I have ?

Armis munitus igneis persequens—

Arma sulphurea gestans, sulphury arms,

Or, might one style a pistol—popping-piece ?

Armatus breviori sclopulo ?

210

We 'll let him have been armed so, though it make

Somewhat against us : I had thought to own—

Provided with a simple travelling-sword,

Ense solummodo viatorio

Instructus : but we 'll grant the pistol here :

215

Better we lost the cause than lacked the gird

At the Fisc's Latin, lost the Judge's laugh !

It 's Venturini that decides for style.

Tommati rather goes upon the law.

So, as to law,—

220

Ah, but with law ne'er hope

To level the fellow,—don't I know his trick !

How he draws up, ducks under, twists aside !

He 's a lean-gutted hectic rascal, fine

As pale-haired red-eyed ferret which pretends

225

'T is ermine, pure soft snow from tail to snout.

He eludes law by piteous looks aloft,

Lets Latin glance off as he makes appeal

To saint that 's somewhere in the ceiling-top :

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK VIII

Do you suppose I don't conceive the beast ? 230
 Plague of the ermine-vermin ! For it takes,
 It takes, and here 's the fellow Fisc, you see,
 And Judge, you 'll not be long in seeing next !
 Confound the fop—he 's now at work like me :
 Enter his study, as I seem to do, 235
 Hear him read out his writing to himself !
 I know he writes as if he spoke : I hear
 The hoarse shrill throat, see shut eyes, neck shot-
 forth,

—I see him strain on tiptoe, soar and pour
 Eloquence out, nor stay nor stint at all— 240
 Perorate in the air, then quick to press
 With the product ! What abuse of type and sheet !
 He 'll keep clear of my cast, my logic-throw,
 Let argument slide, and then deliver swift
 Some bowl from quite an unguessed point of stand— 245
 Having the luck o' the last word, the reply !
 A plaguy cast, a mortifying stroke :
 You face a fellow—cries “ So, there you stand ?
 “ But I discourteous jump clean o'er your head !
 “ You take ship-carpentry for pilotage, 250
 “ Stop rat-holes, while a sea sweeps through the
 breach;—

“ Hammer and fortify at puny points ?
 “ Do, clamp and tenon, make all tight and safe !
 “ 'T is here and here and here you ship a sea,
 “ No good of your stopped leaks and littleness ! ” 255

Yet what do I name “ little and a leak ” ?
 The main defence o' the murder 's used to death,
 By this time, dry bare bones, no scrap we pick :
 Safer I worked the new, the unforeseen,
 The nice by-stroke, the fine and improvised 260
 Point that can titillate the brain o' the Bench
 Torpid with over-teaching long ago !

As if Tommati (that has heard, reheard
And heard again, first this side and then that—
Guido and Pietro, Pietro and Guido, din 265
And deafen, full three years, at each long ear)
Don't want amusement for instruction now,
Won't rather feel a flea run o'er his ribs,
Than a daw settle heavily on his head !
Oh I was young and had the trick of fence, 270
Knew subtle pass and push with careless right—
My left arm ever quiet behind back,
With dagger ready : not both hands to blade !
Puff and blow, put the strength out, Blunderbore !
There's my su' ordinate, young Spreti, now, 275
Pedant and prig,—he'll pant away at proof,
That's his way !

Now for mine—to rub some life
 Into one's choppy fingers this cold day !
 I trust Cinuzzo ties on tippet, guards
 The precious throat on which so much depends !
 Guido must be all goose-flesh in his hole,
 Despite the prison-straw : bad Carnival
 For captives ! no sliced fry for him, poor Count !

Carnival-time,—another providence ! 285
The town a-swarm with strangers to amuse,
To edify, to give one's name and fame
In charge of, till they find, some future day,
Cintino come and claim it, his name too,
Pledge of the pleasantness they owe papa— 290
Who else was it cured Rome of her great qualms,
When she must needs have her own judgment?—ay,
When all her topping wits had set to work,
Pronounced already on the case : mere boys,
Twice Cineruggiolo's age with half his sense, 295
As good as tell me, when I cross the court,

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK VIII

"Master Arcangeli!" (plucking at my gown)
 "We can predict, we comprehend your play,
 "We 'll help you save your client." Tra-la-la!
 I've travelled ground, from childhood to this hour, 300
 To have the town anticipate my track?
 The old fox takes the plain and velvet path,
 The young hound's predilection,—prints the dew,
 Do n't he, to suit their pulpy pads of paw?
 No: Burying nose deep down i' the briery bush, 305
 Thus I defend Count Guido.

Where are we weak?

First, which is foremost in advantage too,
 Our murder,—we call, killing,—is a fact
 Confessed, defended, made a boast of: good! 310
 To think the Fisc claimed use of torture here,
 And got thereby avowal plump and plain
 That gives me just the chance I wanted,—scope
 Not for brute-force but ingenuity,
 Explaining matters, not denying them! 315
 One may dispute,—as I am bound to do,
 And shall,—validity of process here:
 Inasmuch as a noble is exempt
 From torture which plebeians undergo
 In such a case: for law is lenient, lax, 320
 Remits the torture to a nobleman
 Unless suspicion be of twice the strength
 Attaches to a man born vulgarly:
 We don't card silk with comb that dresses wool.
 Moreover 't was severity undue 325
 In this case, even had the lord been lout.
 What utters, on this head, our oracle,
 Our Farinacci, my Gamaliel erst,
 In those immortal "Questions"? This I quote:
 "Of all the tools at Law's disposal, sure 330
 "That named *Vigiliarum* is the best—
 "That is, the worst—to whoso needs must bear:

BOOK VIII DOMINUS HYACINTHUS

"Lasting, as it may do, from some seven hours
 "To ten ; (beyond ten, we 've no precedent ;
 "Certain have touched their ten, but, bah, they
 died !) 335
 "It does so efficaciously convince,
 "That,—speaking by much observation here,—
 "Out of each hundred cases, by my count,
 "Never I knew of patients beyond four
 "Withstand its taste, or less than ninety-six 340
 "End by succumbing : only martyrs four,
 "Of obstinate silence, guilty or no,—against
 "Ninety-six full confessors, innocent
 "Or otherwise,—so shrewd a tool have we ! "
 No marvel either : in unwary hands, 345
 Death on the spot is no rare consequence :
 As indeed all but happened in this case
 Toone of ourselves, our young tough peasant-friend
 The accomplice called Baldeschi: they were rough,
 Dosed him with torture as you drench a horse, 350
 Not modify your treatment to a man :
 So, two successive days he fainted dead,
 And only on the third essay, gave up,
 Confessed like flesh and blood. We could re-
 claim,—
 Blockhead Bottini giving cause enough ! 355
 But no,—we 'll take it as spontaneously
 Confessed : we 'll have the murder beyond doubt.
 Ah, fortunate (the poet's word reversed)
 Inasmuch as we know our happiness !
 Had the antagonist left dubiety, 360
 Here were we proving murder a mere myth,
 And Guido innocent, ignorant, absent,—ay,
 Absent ! He was—why, where should Christian
 be ?—
 Engaged in visiting his proper church,
 The duty of us all at Christmas-time, 365

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK VIII

When Caponsacchi, the seducer, stung
 To madness by his relegation, cast
 About him and contrived a remedy
 In murder : since opprobrium broke afresh,
 By birth o' the babe, on him the imputed sire, 370
 He it was quietly sought to smother up
 His shame and theirs together,—killed the three,
 And fled—(go seek him where you please to
 search)—

Just at the time when Guido, touched by grace,
 Devotions ended, hastened to the spot, 375
 Meaning to pardon his convicted wife,
 "Neither do I condemn thee, go in peace!"—
 And thus arrived i' the nick of time to catch
 The charge o' the killing, though great-heartedly
 He came but to forgive and bring to life. 380
 Doubt ye the force of Christmas on the soul?
 "Is thine eye evil because mine is good?"

So, doubtless, had I needed argue here
 But for the full confession round and sound!
 Thus might you wrong some kingly alchemist,— 385
 Whose concern should not be with showing brass
 Transmuted into gold, but triumphing,
 Rather, about his gold changed out of brass,
 Not vulgarly to the mere sight and touch,
 But in the idea, the spiritual display, 390
 The apparition buoyed by winged words
 Hovering above its birth-place in the brain,—
 Thus would you wrong this excellent personage
 Forced, by the gross need, to gird apron round,
 Plant forge, light fire, ply bellows,—in a word, 395
 Demonstrate : when a faulty pipkin's crack
 May disconcert you his presumptive truth!
 Here were I hanging to the testimony
 Of one of these poor rustics—four, ye gods!

BOOK VIII DOMINUS HYACINTHUS

Whom the first taste of friend the Fiscal's cord 400
May drive into undoing my whole speech,
Undoing, on his birthday,—what is worse,—
My son and heir !

 I wonder, all the same,
Not so much at those peasants' lack of heart ; 405
But—Guido Franceschini, nobleman,
Bear pain no better ! Everybody knows
It used once, when my father was a boy,
To form a proper, nay, important point
I' the education of our well-born youth, 410
That they took torture handsomely at need,
Without confessing in this clownish guise.
Each noble had his rack for private use,
And would, for the diversion of a guest,
Bid it be set up in the yard of arms, 415
And take thereon his hour of exercise,—
Command the varletry stretch, strain their best,
While friends looked on, admired my lord could
 smile
'Mid tugging which had caused an ox to roar.
Men are no longer men ! 420

 —And advocates
No longer Farinacci, let us add,
If I one more time fly from point proposed !
So, *Vindictio*,—here begins the speech !—
Honoris causa ; thus we make our stand : 425
Honour in us had injury, we prove.
Or if we fail to prove such injury
More than misprision of the fact,—what then ?
It is enough, authorities declare,
If the result, the deed in question now, 430
Be caused by confidence that injury
Is veritable and no figment : since,
What, though proved fancy afterward, seemed fact

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK VIII

At the time, they argue shall excuse result.
 That which we do, persuaded of good cause 435
 For what we do, hold justifiable !—
 So casuists bid : man, bound to do his best,
 They would not have him leave that best undone
 And mean to do his worst,—though fuller light
 Show best was worst and worst would have been
 best. 440
 Act by the present light !—they ask of man.
Ultra quod hic non agitur, besides
 It is not anyway our business here,
De probatione adulterii,
 To prove what we thought crime was crime indeed, 445
Ad irrogandam pœnam, and require
 Its punishment : such nowise do we seek :
Sed ad effectum, but 't is our concern,
Excusandi, here to simply find excuse,
Occisorem, for who did the killing-work, 450
Et ad illius defensionem, (mark
 The difference) and defend the man, just that !
Quo casu levior probatio
Exuberaret, to which end far lighter proof
 Suffices than the prior case would claim : 455
 It should be always harder to convict,
 In short, than to establish innocence.
 Therefore we shall demonstrate first of all
 That Honour is a gift of God to man
 Precious beyond compare : which natural sense 460
 Of human rectitude and purity,—
 Which white, man's soul is born with,—brooks no
 touch :
 Therefore, the sensitivest spot of all,
 Wounded by any wafture breathed from black,
 Is,—honour within honour, like the eye 465
 Centred i' the ball,—the honour of our wife.
 Touch us o' the pupil of our honour, then,

BOOK VIII DOMINUS HYACINTHUS

Not actually,—since so you slay outright,—
But by a gesture simulating touch,
Presumable mere menace of such taint,—
This were our warrant for eruptive ire
“To whose dominion I impose no end.”

(Virgil, now, should not be too difficult
To Cinoncino,—say, the early books.
Pen, truce to further gambols! *Poscimus!*) 475

Nor can revenge of injury done here
To the honour proved the life and soul of us,
Be too excessive, too extravagant :
Such wrong seeks and must have complete re-
venge.

Snow we this, first, on the mere natural ground : 480
Begin at the beginning, and proceed
Incontrovertibly. Theodoric,
In an apt sentence Cassiodorus cites,
Propounds for basis of all household law—
I hardly recollect it, but it ends, 485
“ Bird mates with bird, beast genders with his like,
“ And brooks no interference.” Bird and beast ?
The very insects . . . if they wive or no,
How dare I say when Aristotle doubts ?
But the presumption is they likewise wive, 490
At least the nobler sorts ; for take the bee
As instance,—copying King Solomon,—
Why that displeasure of the bee to aught
That savours of incontinency, makes
The unchaste a very horror to the hive ? 495
Whence comes it bees obtain their epithet
Of *castæ apes*, notably “ the chaste ” ?
Because, ingeniously saith Scaliger,
(The young sage,—see his book of Table-talk)
“ Such is their hatred of immodest act, 500

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK VIII

"They fall upon the offender, sting to death."
 I mind a passage much confirmative
 I' the Idyllist (though I read him Latinized)
 "Why" asks a shepherd, "is this bank unfit
 "For celebration of our vernal loves?" 505
 "Oh swain," returns the instructed shepherdess,
 "Bees swarm here, and would quick resent our
 warmth!"

Only cold-blooded fish lack instinct here,
 Nor gain nor guard connubiality :
 But beasts, quadrupedal, mammiferous, 510
 Do credit to their beasthood : witness him
 That Ælian cites, the noble elephant,
 (Or if not Ælian, somebody as sage)
 Who seeing, much offence beneath his nose,
 His master's friend exceed in courtesy 515
 The due allowance to his master's wife,
 Taught them good manners and killed both at once,
 Making his master and the world admire.
 Indubitably, then, that master's self,
 Favoured by circumstance, had done the same 520
 Or else stood clear rebuked by his own "beast.
Adeo, ut qui honorem spernit, thus,
 Who values his own honour not a straw,—
Et non recuperare curat, nor
 Labours by might and main to salve its wound, 525
Se ulciscendo, by revenging him,
Nil differat a belluis, is a brute,
Quinimo irrationabilior
Ipsismet belluis, nay, contrariwise,
 Much more irrational than brutes themselves, 530
 Should be considered, *reputetur*! How?
 If a poor animal feel honour smart,
 Taught by blind instinct nature plants in him,
 Shall man,—confessed creation's master-stroke,
 Nay, intellectual glory, nay, a god, 535

BOOK VIII DOMINUS HYACINTHUS

Nay, of the nature of my Judges here,—
 Shall man prove the insensible, the block,
 The blot o' the earth he crawls on to disgrace?
 (Come, that 's both solid and poetic !) Man
 Derogate, live for the low tastes alone, 540
 Mean creeping cares about the animal life?
Absit such homage to vile flesh and blood !

(May Gigia have remembered, nothing stings
 Fried liver out of its monotony
 Of richness, like a root of fennel, chopped 545
 Fine with the parsley : parsley-sprigs, I said—
 Was there need I should say "and fennel too" ?
 But no, she cannot have been so obtuse !
 To our argument ! The fennel will be chopped.)

From beast to man next mount we—ay, but, mind, 550
 Still mere man, not yet Christian,—that, in time !
 Not too fast, mark you ! 'Tis on Heathen grounds
 We next defend our act : then, fairly urge—
 If this were done of old, in a green tree,
 Allowed in the Spring rawness of our kind, 555
 What may be licensed in the Autumn dry
 And ripe, the latter harvest-tide of man ?
 If, with his poor and primitive half-lights,
 The Pagan, whom our devils served for gods,
 Could stigmatise the breach of marriage-vow 560
 As that which blood, blood only might efface,—
 Absolve the husband, outraged, whose revenge
 Anticipated law, plied sword himself,—
 How with the Christian in full blaze of noon ?
 Shall not he rather double penalty, 565
 Multiply vengeance, than, degenerate,
 Let privilege be minished, droop, decay ?
 Therefore set forth at large the ancient law !
 Superabundant the examples be

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK VIII

To pick and choose from. The Athenian Code, 570
 Solon's, the name is serviceable,—then,
 The Laws of the Twelve Tables, that fifteenth,—
 “Romulus” likewise rolls out round and large ;
 The Julian ; the Cornelian ; Gracchus' Law :
 So old a chime, the bells ring of themselves ! 575
 Spreti can set that going if he please,
 I point you, for my part, the belfry plain,
 Intent to rise from dusk, *diluculum*,
 Into the Christian day shall broaden next.

First, the fit compliment to His Holiness 580
 Happily reigning : then sustain the point—
 All that was long ago declared as law
 By the natural revelation, stands confirmed
 By Apostle and Evangelist and Saint,—
 To-wit—that Honour is man's supreme good. 585
 Why should I baulk Saint Jerome of his phrase ?
Ubi honor non est, where no honour is,
Ibi contemptus est ; and where contempt,
Ibi injuria frequens ; and where that,
 The frequent injury, *ibi et indignatio* ; 590
 And where the indignation, *ibi quies*
Nulla : and where there is no quietude,
 Why, *ibi*, there, the mind is often cast
 Down from the heights where it proposed to dwell,
Mens a proposito sæpe dejicitur. 595
 And naturally the mind is so cast down,
 Since harder 't is, *quum difficilius sit*,
Iram cohibere, to coerce one's wrath,
Quam miracula facere, than work miracles,—
 So Gregory smiles in his First Dialogue. 600
 Whence we infer, the ingenuous soul, the man
 Who makes esteem of honour and repute,
 Whenever honour and repute are touched
 Arrives at term of fury and despair,

BOOK VIII DOMINUS HYACINTHUS

Loses all guidance from the reason-check : 605
 As in delirium or a frenzy-fit,
 Nor fury nor despair he satiates, – no,
 Not even if he attain the impossible,
 O’erturn the hinges of the universe
 To annihilate—not whoso caused the smart 610
 Solely, the author simply of his pain,
 But the place, the memory, *vituperu*,
 O’ the shame and scorn : *quia*,—says Solomon,
 (The Holy Spirit speaking by his mouth
 In Proverbs, the sixth chapter near the end) 615
 —Because, the zeal and fury of a man,
Zelus et furor viri, will not spare,
Non parcat, in the day of his revenge,
In diuindictæ, nor will acquiesce,
Nec acquiescet, through a person’s prayers, 620
Cujusdam precibus,—*nec suscipiet*,
 Nor yet take, *pro redemptione*, for
 Redemption, *dona plurium*, gifts of friends,
 Mere money-payment to compound for ache.
 Who recognizes not my client’s case ? 625
 Whereto, as strangely consentaneous here,
 Adduce Saint Bernard in the Epistle writ
 To Robertulus, his nephew : “ Too much grief,
 “ *Dolor quippe nimius non deliberat*,
 “ Does not excogitate propriety, 630
 “ *Non vericundatur*, nor knows shame at all,
 “ *Non consulit rationem*, nor consults
 “ Reason, *non dignitatis metuit*
 “ *Damnum*, nor dreads the loss of dignity ;
 “ *Modum et ordinem*, order and the mode, 635
 “ *Ignorat*, it ignores ” : why, trait for trait,
 Was ever portrait limned so like the life ?
 (By Cavalier Maratta, shall I say ?
 I hear he ’s first in reputation: now.)
 Yes, that of Samson in the Sacred Text 640

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK VIII

That 's not so much the portrait as the man !
 Samson in Gaza was the antetype
 Of Guido at Rome : observe the Nazarite !
 Blinded he was,—an easy thing to bear :
 Intrepidly he took imprisonment, 645
 Gyves, stripes and daily labour at the mill :
 But when he found himself, i' the public place
 Destined to make the common people sport,
 Disdain burned up with such an impetus
 I' the breast of him that, all the man one fire, 650
Moriatur, roared he, let my soul's self die,
Anima mea, with the Philistines !
 So, pulled down pillar, roof, and death and all,
Multosque plures interfecit, ay,
 And many more he killed thus, *morians*, 655
 Dying, *quam vivens*, than in his whole life,
Occiderat, he ever killed before.
 Are these things writ for no example, Sirs ?
 One instance more, and let me see who doubts !
 Our Lord Himself, made all of mansuetude, 660
 Sealing the sum of sufferance up, received
 Opprobrium, contumely and buffeting
 Without complaint: but when He found Himself
 Touched in His honour never so little for once,
 Then outbroke indignation pent before— 665
 “ *Honorem meum nemini dabo !* ” “ No,
 “ My honour I to nobody will give ! ”
 And certainly the example so hath wrought,
 That whosoever, at the proper worth,
 Apprises worldly honour and repute, 670
 Esteems it nobler to die honoured man
 Beneath Mannaia, than live centuries
 Disgraced in the eye o' the world. We find
 Saint Paul
 No recreant to his faith delivered once :
 “ Far worthier were it that I died,” cries he, 675

BOOK VIII DOMINUS HYACINTHUS

Expedit mihi magis mori, "than
 "That anyone should make my glory void,"
Quam ut gloriam meam quis evacuet!
 See, *ad Corinthienses*: whereupon
 Saint Ambrose makes a comment with much fruit, 680
 Doubtless my Judges long since laid to heart,
 So I desist from bringing forward here.
 (I can't quite recollect it.)

Have I proved
Satis superque, both enough and to spare, 685
 That Revelation old and new admits
 The natural man may effervesce in ire,
 O'erflood earth, o'erfroth heaven with foamy rage,
 At the first puncture to his self-respect?
 Then, Sirs, this Christian dogma, this law-bud 690
 Full-blown now, soon to bask the absolute flower
 Of Papal doctrine in our blaze of day,—
 Bethink you, shall we miss one promise-streak,
 One doubtful birth of dawn crepuscular,
 One dew-drop comfort to humanity, 695
 Now that the chalice teems with noonday wine?
 Yea, argue Molinists who bar revenge—
 Referring just to what makes out our case!
 Under old dispensation, argue they,
 The doom of the adulterous wife was death, 700
 Stoning by Moses' law. "Nay, stone her not,
 "Put her away!" next legislates our Lord;
 And last of all, "Nor yet divorce a wife!"
 Ordains the Church, "she typifies ourself,
 "The Bridenofault shall cause to fall from Christ." 705
 Then, as no jot nor tittle of the Law
 Has passed away—which who presumes to doubt?
 As not one word of Christ is rendered vain—
 Which, could it be though heaven and earth
 should pass?

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK VIII

—Where do I find my proper punishment 710
 For my adulterous wife, I humbly ask
 Of my infallible Pope,—who now remits
 Even the divorce allowed by Christ in lieu
 Of lapidation Moses licensed me?
 The Gospel checks the Law which throws the stone, 715
 The Church tears the divorce-bill Gospel grants :
 Shall wives sin and enjoy impunity?
 What profits me the fulness of the days,
 The final dispensation, I demand,
 Unless Law, Gospel and the Church subjoin 720
 “ But who hath barred thee primitive revenge,
 “ Which, like fire damped and dammed up, burns
 more fierce?
 “ Use thou thy natural privilege of man,
 “ Else wert thou found like those old ingrate Jews,
 “ Despite the manna-banquet on the board, 725
 “ A-longing after melons, cucumbers,
 “ And such like trash of Egypt left behind ! ”

(There was one melon had improved our soup :
 But did not Cinoncino need the rind
 To make a boat with ? So I seem to think.) 730

Law, Gospel and the Church—from these we leap
 To the very last revealment, easy rule
 Befitting the well-born and thorough-bred
 O' the happy day we live in, not the dark 735
 O' the early rude and acorn-eating race.
 “ Behold,” quoth James, “ we bridle in a horse
 “ And turn his body as we would thereby ! ”
 Yea, but we change the bit to suit the growth,
 And rasp our colt's jaw with a rugged spike
 We hasten to remit our managed steed 740
 Who wheels round at persuasion of a touch.
 Civilization bows to decency,

BOOK VIII DOMINUS HYACINTHUS

The acknowledged use and wont : 't is manners,
—mild

But yet imperative law,—which make the man.
Thus do we pay the proper compliment 745

To rank, and that society of Rome,
Hath so obliged us by its interest,
Taken our client's part instinctively,
As unaware defending its own cause.

What *ditum* doth Society lay down 750
I' the case of one who hath a faithless wife ?

Wherewithal should the husband cleanse his way ?
Be patient and forgive ? Oh, language fails,—
Shrinks from depicting his turpitude !

For if wronged husband raise not hue and cry, 755
Quod si maritus de adulterio non

Conqueretur, he 's presumed a—foh !

Presumitur leno : so, complain he must.

But how complain ? At your tribunal, lords ?
Far weightier challenge suits your sense, I wot ! 760

You sit not to have gentlemen propose
Questions gentility can itself discuss.

Did not you prove that to our brother Paul ?

The Abate, *quum judicialiter*

Prosequeretur, when he tried the law, 765

Guidonis causam, in Count Guido's case,

Accidit ipsi, this befell himself,

Quod risum moverit et cachinnos, that

He moved to mirth and cachinnation, all

Or nearly all, *fere in omnibus* 770

Etiam sensatis et cordatis, men

Strong-sensed, sound-hearted, nay, the very Court,

Ipsismet in iudiciis, I might add,

Non tamen dicam. In a cause like this,

So multiplied were reasons *pro* and *con*, 775

Delicate, intertwined and obscure,

That Law refused loan of a finger-tip

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK VIII

To unravel, re-adjust the hopeless twine,
 Since, half-a-dozen steps outside Law's seat,
 There stood a foolish trifler with a tool 780
 A-dangle to no purpose by his side,
 Had clearly cut the embroilment in a trice.

Asserunt enim unanimiter

Doctores, for the Doctors all assert,
 That husbands, *quod mariti*, must be held 785
Viles, cornuti reputantur, vile,
 Fronts branching forth a florid infamy,
Si propriis manibus, if with their own hands,
Non sumunt, they fail straight to take revenge,
Vindictam, but expect the deed be done 790

By the Court—*expectant illam fieri*

Per iudices, qui summopere rident, which
 Gives an enormous guffaw for reply,
Et cachinnantur. For he ran away,
Deliquit enim, just that he might 'scape 795

The censure of both counsellors and crowd,

Ut vulgi et doctorum evitaret

Censuram, and lest so he superadd

To loss of honour ignominy too,

Et sic ne istam quoque ignominiam 800

Amisso honori superadderet.

My lords, my lords, the inconsiderate step
 Was—we referred ourselves to Law at all!
 Twit me not with "Law else had punished you!"

Each punishment of the extra-legal step, 805

To which the high-born preferably revert,

Is ever for some oversight, some slip

I' the taking vengeance, not for vengeance' self.

A good thing, done unhandsomely, turns ill;

And never yet lacked ill the law's rebuke. 810

For pregnant instance, let us contemplate

The luck of Leonardus,—see at large

Of Sicily's Decisions sixty-first.

BOOK VIII DOMINUS HYACINTHUS

This Leonard finds his wife is false : what then ?
 He makes her own son snare her, and entice 815
 Out of the town walls to a private walk
 Wherein he slays her with commodity.
 They find her body half-devoured by dogs :
 Leonard is tried, convicted, punished, sent
 To labour in the galleys seven years long : 820
 Why? For the murder? Nay, but for the mode!
Malus modus occidendi, ruled the Court,
 An ugly mode of killing, nothing more !
 Another fructuous sample,—see "*De Re*
 "*Criminali*," in Matthæus' divine piece. 825
 Another husband, in no better plight,
 Simulates absence, thereby tempts his wife ;
 On whom he falls, out of sly ambuscade,
 Backed by a brother of his, and both of them
 Armed to the teeth with arms that law had blamed. 830
Nimis dolose, overwilyly,
Fuisse operatum, did they work,
 Pronounced the law : had all been fairly done
 Law had not found him worthy, as she did,
 Of four years' exile. Why cite more? Enough 835
 Is good as a feast—(unless a birthday-feast
 For one's Cinuccio) so, we finish here.
 My lords, we rather need defend ourselves
 Inasmuch as, for a twinkling of an eye,
 We hesitatingly appealed to law,— 840
 Than need deny that, on mature advice,
 We blushinglly bethought us, bade revenge
 Back to its simple proper private way
 Of decent self-dealt gentlemanly death.
 Judges, here is the law, and here beside, 845
 The testimony ! Look to it !

Pause and breathe !

So far is only too plain ; we must watch :
 Bottini will scarce hazard an attack

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK VIII

Here : best anticipate the fellow's play 850
 And guard the weaker places—warily ask,
 What if considerations of a sort,
 Reasons of a kind, arise from out the strange
 Peculiar unforeseen new circumstance
 Of this our (candour owns) abnormal act, 855
 To bar the right of us revenging so ?
 "Impunity were otherwise your meed :
 "Go slay your wife and welcome,"—may be
 urged,—
 "But why the innocent old couple slay,
 "Pietro, Violante? You may do enough, 860
 "Not too much, not exceed the golden mean :
 "Neither brute-beast nor Pagan, Gentile, Jew,
 "Nor Christian, no nor votarist of the mode,
 "Is justified to push revenge so far."

No, indeed? Why, thou very sciolist ! 865
 The actual wrong, Pompilia seemed to do,
 Was virtual wrong done by the parents here—
 Imposing her upon us as their child—
 Themselves allow: then, her fault was their fault,
 Her punishment be theirs accordingly ! 870
 But wait a little, sneak not off so soon !
 Was this cheat solely harm to Guido, pray ?
 The precious couple you call innocent,—
 Why, they were felons that Law failed to clutch,
Qui ut fraudarent, who that they might rob, 875
Legitime vocatos, folk law called,
Ad fidei commissum, true heirs to the Trust,
Partum supposuerunt, feigned this birth,
Inmemores reos factos esse, blind
 To the fact that, guilty, they incurred thereby, 880
Ultimi supplicii, hanging or what 's worse.
 Do you blame us that we turn Law's instruments,
 Not mere self-seekers,—mind the public weal,

BOOK VIII DOMINUS HYACINTHUS

Nor make the private good our sole concern?
That having—shall I say—secured a thief, 885
Not simply we recover from his pouch
The stolen article our property,
But also pounce upon our neighbour's purse
We opportunely find reposing there,
And do him justice while we right ourselves? 890
He owes us, for our part, a drubbing, say,
But owes our neighbour just a dance i' the air
Under the gallows : so, we throttle him.
That neighbour 's Law, that couple are the Thief,
We are the over ready to help Law— 895
Zeal of her house hath eaten us up : for which,
Can it be, Law intends to eat up us,
Crudum Priamum, devour poor Priam raw,
('T was jupiter's own joke) with babes to boot,
Priamique pisinnos, in Homeric phrase? 900
Shame !——and so ends my period prettily.

But even,—prove the pair not culpable,
 From unborn babe from connivance at,
 Participation in, their daughter's fault :
 Ours the mistake. Is that a rare event? 905
Non semel, it is anything but rare,
In contingencia facti, that by chance,
Impunes evaserunt, go scot-free,
Qui, such well-meaning people as ourselves,
Iusto dolore moti, who aggrieved 910
 With cause, *apposuerunt manus*, lay
 Rough hands, *in innocentes*, on wrong heads.
 Cite we an illustrative case in point :
Mulier Smirna quedam, good my lords,
 A gentlewoman lived in Smyrna once, 915
Virum et filium ex eo conceptum, who
 Both husband and her son begot by him
 Killed, *interfecerat, ex quo*, because,

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK VIII

Vir filium suum perdiderat, her spouse
 Had been beforehand with her, killed her son, 920
Matrimonii primi, of a previous bed.
Deinde accusata, then accused,
Apud Dolabellam, before him that sat
Proconsul, nec duabus cædibus
Contaminatum liberare, nor 925
 To liberate a woman doubly-dyed
 With murder, *voluit*, made he up his mind,
Nec condemnare, nor to doom to death,
Iusto dolore impulsam, one impelled
 By just grief; *sed remisit*, but sent her up 930
Ad Areopagum, to the Hill of Mars,
Sapientissimorum judicium
Cætum, to that assembly of the sage
 Paralleled only by my judges here;
Ubi, cognito de causa, where, the cause 935
 Well weighed, *responsum est*, they gave reply,
Ut ipsa et accusator, that both sides
 O' the suit, *redirent*, should come back again,
Post centum annos, after a hundred years,
 For judgment; *et sic*, by which sage decrec, 940
Duplici parricidio rea, one
 Convicted of a double parricide,
Quamvis etiam innocentem, though in truth
 Out of the pair, one innocent at least
 She, *occidisset*, plainly had put to death, 945
Undequaque, yet she altogether 'scaped,
Evasit impunis. See the case at length
 In Valerius, fittingly styled *Maximus*,
 That eighth book of his Memorable Facts.
 Nor Cyriacus cites beside the mark : 950
Similiter uxor quæ mandaverat,
 Just so, a lady who had taken care,
Homicidium viri, that her lord be killed
Ex denegatione debiti,

BOOK VIII DOMINUS HYACINTHUS

For denegation of a certain debt, 955
Matrimonialis, he was loth to pay,
Fuit pecuniaria multa, was
 Amerced in a pecuniary mulct,
Punita, et ad pœnam, and to pains,
Temporalem, for a certain space of time, 960
In monasterio, in a convent.

(Ay,

In monasterio ! He mismanages
In with the ablative, the accusative !
 I had hoped to have hitched the villain into verse 965
 For a gift, this very day, a complete list
 O' the prepositions each with proper case,
 Telling a story, long was in my head.
 "What prepositions take the accusative ?
Ad to or at—*who saw the cat ?*—down to 970
Ob, for, because of, *keep her claws off !*" Tush !
 Law in a man takes the whole liberty :
 The muse is fettered : just as Ovid found !)

And now, sea widens and the coast is clear.
 What of the dubious act you bade excuse ? 975
 Surely things broaden, brighten, till at length
 Remains—so far from act that needs defence—
 Apology to make for act delayed
 One minute, let alone eight mortal months
 Of hesitation ! "Why procrastinate ?" 980
 (Out with it, my Bottinius, ease thyself !)
 "Right, promptly done, is twice right : right
 delayed
 "Turns wrong. We grant you should have killed
 your wife,
 "But killed o' the moment, at the meeting her
 "In company with the priest: then did the tongue 985
 "O' the Brazen Head give license, 'Time is now !'

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK VIII

"Wait to make mind up? 'Time is past' it peals.
 "Friend, you are competent to mastery
 "O' the passions that confessedly explain
 "An outbreak : you allow an interval, 990
 "And then break out as if time's clock still clanged.
 "You have forfeited your chance, and flat you fall
 "Into the commonplace category
 "Of men bound to go softly all their days,
 "Obeying Law." 995

Now, which way make response?
 What was the answer Guido gave, himself?
 —That so to argue came of ignorance
 How honour bears a wound. "For, wound,"
 said he,

"My body, and the smart soon mends and ends : 1000
 "While, wound my soul where honour sits and rules,
 "Longer the sufferance, stronger grows the pain,
 "Being *ex incontinenti*, fresh as first."

But try another tack, urge common sense
 By way of contrast : say—Too true, my lords ! 1005
 We did demur, awhile did hesitate :

Since husband sure should let a scruple speak
 Ere he slay wife,—for his own safety, lords !
 Carpers abound in this misjudging world :
 Moreover, there 's a nicety in law 1010

That seems to justify them should they carp.
 Suppose the source of injury a son,—
 Father may slay such son yet run no risk :
 Why graced with such a privilege? Because
 A father so incensed with his own child, 1015
 Or must have reason, or believe he has :

Quia semper, seeing that in such event,
Presumitur, the law is bound suppose,
Quod capiat pater, that the sire must take,
Bonum consilium pro filio, 1020

The best course as to what befits his boy,

BOOK VIII DOMINUS HYACINTHUS

Through instinct, *ex instinctu*, of mere love,
Amoris, and, *paterni*, fatherhood ;
Quam confidentiam, which confidence,
Non habet, law declines to entertain, 1025
De viro, of the husband : where finds he
An instinct that compels him love his wife ?
Rather is he presumably her foe.
So, let him ponder long in this bad world
Ere do the simplest act of justice. 1030

But

Again—and here we brush Bottini's breast—
Object you, " See the danger of delay !
" Suppose a man murdered my friend last month :
" Had I come up and killed him for his pains 1035
" In rage, I had done right, allows the law :
" I meet him now and kill him in cold blood,
" I do wrong, equally allows the law :
" Wherein do actions differ, yours and mine ?"
In plenitudine intellectus es ? 1040
Hast thy wits, Fisc ? To take such slayer's life,
Returns it life to thy slain friend at all ?
Had he stolen ring instead of stabbing friend,—
To-day, to-morrow or next century,
Meeting the thief, thy ring upon his thumb, 1045
Thou justifiably hadst wrung it thence :
So, couldst thou wrench thy friend's life back again,
Though prisoned in the bosom of his foe,
Why, law would look complacent on thy wrath.
Our case is, that the thing we lost, we found : 1050
The honour, we were robbed of eight months since,
Being recoverable at any day
By death of the delinquent. Go thy ways !
Ere thou hast learned law, will be much to do,
As said the gaby while he shod the goose. 1055
Nay, if you urge me, interval was none !

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK VIII

From the inn to the villa—blank or else a bar
 Of adverse and contrarious incident
 Solid between us and our just revenge !
 What with the priest who flourishes his blade, 1060
 The wife who like a fury flings at us,
 The crowd—and then the capture, the appeal
 To Rome, the journey there, the jaunting thence
 To shelter at the House of Convertites,
 The visits to the Villa, and so forth, 1065
 Where was one minute left us all this while
 To put in execution that revenge
 We planned o' the instant?—as it were, plumped
 down
 O' the spot, some eight months since, which round
 sound egg,
 Rome, more propitious than our nest, should hatch ! 1070
 Object not, "You reached Rome on Christmas-eve,
 "And, despite liberty to act at once,
 "Waited a whole and indecorous week !"
 Hath so the Molinism, the canker, lords,
 Eaten to our bone ? Is no religion left ? 1075
 No care for aught held holy by the Church ?
 What, would you have us skip and miss those Feasts
 O' the Natal Time, must we go prosecute
 Secular business on a sacred day ?
 Should not the merest charity expect, 1080
 Setting our poor concerns aside for once,
 We hurried to the song matutinal
 I' the Sistine, and pressed forward for the Mass
 The Cardinal that 's Camerlengo chaunts,
 Then rushed on to the blessing of the Hat 1085
 And Rapier, which the Pope sends to what prince
 Has done most detriment to the Infidel—
 And thereby whetted courage if 't were blunt ?
 Meantime, allow we kept the house a week,
 Suppose not we were idle in our mew ! 1090

BOOK VIII DOMINUS HYACINTHUS

Picture us raging here and raving there—

“ ‘Money?’ I need none. ‘Friends?’ The word
is null.

“ Restore the white was on that shield of mine

“ Borne at” . . . wherever might be shield to bear.

“ I see my grandsire, he who fought so well 1095

“ At” . . . here find out and put in time and place,

Or else invent the fight his grandsire fought :

“ I see this ! I see that !”

(See nothing else,

Or I shall scarce see lamb's fry in an hour ! 1100

What to the uncle, as I bid advance

The smoking dish ? “ Fry suits a tender tooth !

“ Beho — as we care a little for our kin—

“ You, Sir, —who care so much for cousinship

“ As come to your poor loving nephew's feast !” 1105

He has the reversion of a long lease yet—

Land to bequeath ! He loves lamb's fry, I know !)

Here fall to be considered those same six

Qualities ; what Bottini needs must call

So many aggravations of our crime, 1110

Parasite-growth upon mere murder's back.

We summarily might dispose of such

By some off-hand and jaunty fling, some skit—

“ So, since there 's proved no crime to aggravate,

“ A fico for your aggravations, Fisc !” 1115

No,—handle mischief rather,—play with spells

Were meant to raise a spirit, and laugh the while

We show that did he rise we stand his match !

Therefore, first aggravation : we made up—

Over and above our simple murderous selves— 1120

A regular assemblage of armed men,

Coadunatio armatorum,—ay,

Unluckily it was the very judge

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK VIII

That sits in judgment on our cause to-day
 Who passed the law as Governor of Rome : 1125
 "Four men armed,"—though for lawful purpose,
 mark !

Much more for an acknowledged crime,---"shall
 die."

We five were armed to the teeth, meant murder too?
 Why, that 's the very point that saves us, Fisc !
 Let me instruct you. Crime nor doneor meant,— 1130
 You punish still who arm and congregate :

For wherefore use bad means to a good end ?
 Crime being meant not done,—you punish still
 The means to crime, whereon you haply pounce,
 Though accident have balked them of effect. 1135

But crime not only compassed but complete,
 Meant and donetoo? Why, since you have the end,
 Be that your sole concern, nor mind those means
 No longer to the purpose ! Murdered we ?
 (—Which, that our luck was in the present case, 1140

Quod contigisse in presenti casu,

Is palpable, *manibus palpatum est* —)

Make murder out against us, nothing else !

Of many crimes committed with a view
 To one main crime, Law overlooks the less, 1145
 Intent upon the large. Suppose a man,

Having in view commission of a theft,
 Climbs the town-wall : 't is for the theft he hangs,
 In case he stands convicted of such theft :

Law remits whipping, due to who clomb wall 1150
 Through bravery or wantonness alone,
 Just to dislodge a daw's nest, plant a flag.

So I interpret you the manly mind
 Of him about to judge both you and me,—
 Our Governor, who, being no Fisc, my Fisc, 1155
 Cannot have blundered on ineptitude !

Next aggravation,—that the arms themselves

BOOK VIII DOMINUS HYACINTHUS

Were specially of such forbidden sort
 Through shape or length or breadth, as, prompt,
 Law plucks
 From single hand of solitary man, 1160
 Making him pay the carriage with his life :
Delatio armorum, arms against the rule,
Contra formam constitutionis, of
 Pope Alexander's blessed memory.
 Such are the poignards with the double prong, 1165
 Horn-like, when tines make bold the antlered buck,
 Each prong of brittle glass—wherewith to stab
 And break off short and so let fragment stick
 Fast in the flesh to baffle surgery :
 Such being the Genoese blade with hooked edge 1170
 That did us service at the villa here.
Sed parcat mihi tam eximius vir,
 But, --let so rare a personage forgive, —
 Fisc, thy objection is a foppery !
 Thy charge runs that we killed three innocents : 1175
 Killed, dost see? Then, if killed, what matter how?
 By stick or stone, by sword or dagger, tool
 Long or tool short, round or triangular—
 Poor slain folk find small comfort in the choice !
 Means to an end, means to an end, my Fisc ! 1180
 Nature cries out, "Take the first arms you find !"
Furor ministrat arma : where 's a stone ?
Unde mi lapidem, where darts for me ?
Unde sagittas ? But subdue the bard
 And rationalize a little. Eight months since, 1185
 Had we, or had we not, incurred your blame
 For letting 'scape unpunished this bad pair ?
 I think I proved that in last paragraph !
 Why did we so ? Because our courage failed.
 Wherefore ? Through lack of arms to fight the foe : 1190
 We had no arms or merely lawful ones,
 An unimportant sword and blunderbuss,

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK VIII

Against a foe, pollent in potency,
 The *amasius*, and our vixen of a wife.
 Well then, how culpably do we gird loin 1195
 And once more undertake the high emprise,
 Unless we load ourselves this second time
 With handsome superfluity of arms,
 Since better is "too much" than "not enough,"
 And "*plus non vitiat*," too much does no harm, 1200
 Except in mathematics, sages say.
 Gather instruction from the parable !
 At first we are advised—"A lad hath here
 "Seven barley loaves and two small fishes: what
 "Is that among so many?" Aptly asked : 1205
 But put that question twice and, quite as apt,
 The answer is "Fragments, twelve baskets full !"

And, while we speak of superabundance, fling
 We word by the way to fools who cast their flout
 On Guido—"Punishment were pardoned him, 1210
 "But here the punishment exceeds offence :
 "He might be just, but he was cruel too !"
 Why, grant there seems a kind of cruelty
 In downright stabbing people he could maim,
 (If so you stigmatize the stern and strict) 1215
 Still, Guido meant no cruelty—may plead
 Transgression of his mandate, over-zeal
 O' the part of his companions : all he craved
 Was, they should fray the faces of the folk,
 Merely disfigure, nowise make them die. 1220
Solummodo fassus est, he owns no more,
Dedisse mandatum, than that he desired,
Ad sfrisiandum, dicam, that they hack
 And hew, i' the customary phrase, his wife,
Uxorem tantum, and no harm beside. 1225
 If his instructions then be misconceived,
 Nay, disobeyed, impute you blame to him ?

Third aggravation : that our act was done— 1250
 Not in the public street, where safety lies,
 Not in the bye-place, caution may avoid,
 Wood, cavern, desert, spots contrived for crime,—
 But in the very house, home, nook and nest,
 O' the victims, murdered in their dwelling-place, 1255
In domo ac habitatione propria,
 Where all presumably is peace and joy.
 The spider, crime, pronounce we twice a pest
 When, creeping from congenial cottage, she
 Taketh hold with her hands, to horrify 1260
 His household more, i' the palace of the king.

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK VIII

All three were housed and safe and confident.
 Moreover, the permission that our wife
 Should have at length *domum pro carcere*,
 Her own abode in place of prison—why, 1265
 We ourselves granted, by our other self
 And proxy Paolo : did we make such grant,
 Meaning a lure ?—elude the vigilance
 O' the jailor, lead her to commodious death,
 While we ostensibly relented ? 1270

Ay,

Just so did we, nor otherwise, my Fisc !
 Is vengeance lawful ? We demand our right,
 But find it will be questioned or refused
 By jailor, turnkey, hangdog,—what know we ? 1275
 Pray, how is it we should conduct ourselves ?
 To gain our private right—break public peace,
 Do you bid us ?—trouble order with our broils ?
 Endanger . . . shall I shrink to own . . . ourselves ?—
 Who want no broken head nor bloody nose 1280
 (While busied slitting noses, breaking heads)
 From the first tipstaff that may interfere !
Nam quicquid sit, for howsoever it be,
An de consensu nostro, if with leave
 Or not, *a monasterio*, from the nuns, 1285
Educta esset, she had been led forth,
Potuiamus id dissimulare, we
 May well have granted leave in pure pretence,
Ut aditum habere, that thereby
 An entry we might compass, a free move 1290
Potuissemus, to her easy death,
Ad eam occidendam. Privacy
 O' the hearth, and sanctitude of home, say you ?
 Shall we give man's abode more privilege
 Than God's ?—for in the churches where He dwells, 1295
In quibus assistit Regum Rex, by means
 Of His essence, *per essentiam*, all the same,

BOOK VIII DOMINUS HYACINTHUS

Et nihilominus, therein, *in eis*,
Ex justa via delinquens, whoso dares
 To take a liberty on ground enough, 1300
 Is pardoned, *excusatur* : that 's our case—
 Delinquent through befitting cause. You hold,
 To punish a false wife in her own house
 Is graver than, what happens every day,
 To hale a debtor from his hiding-place 1305
 In church protected by the Sacrament?
 To this conclusion have I brought my Fisc?
 Foxes have holes, and fowls o' the air their nests;
 Praise you the impiety that follows, Fisc?
 Shall false wife yet have where to lay her head? 1310
 "*Contra Fiscum definitum est!*" He 's done!
 "*Surge et scribe*," make a note of it!
 —If I may dally with Aquinas' word.

Or in the death-throe does he mutter still,
 Fourth aggravation, that we changed our garb, 1315
 And rusticized ourselves with uncouth hat,
 Rough vest and goatskin wrappage; murdered thus
Mutatione vestium, in disguise,
 Whereby mere murder got complexed with wile,
 Turned *homicidium ex insidiis*? Fisc, 1320
 How often must I round thee in the ears—
 All means are lawful to a lawful end?
 Concede he had the right to kill his wife :
 The Count indulged in a travesty; why?
De illa ut vindictam sumeret, 1325
 That on her he might lawful vengeance take,
Commodius, with more ease, *et tutius*,
 And safelier : wants he warrant for the step?
 Read to thy profit how the Apostle once
 For ease and safety, when Damascus raged, 1330
 Was let down in a basket by the wall
 To 'scape the malice of the gov. nor

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK VIII

(Another sort of Governor boasts Rome !)
 —Many are of opinion,—covered close,
 Concealed with—what except that very cloak 1335
 He left behind at Troas afterward ?
 I shall not add a syllable : Molinists may !
 Well, have we more to manage ? Ay, indeed !
 Fifth aggravation, that our wife reposed
Sub potestate judicis, beneath 1340
 Protection of the judge,—her house was styled
 A prison, and his power became its guard
 In lieu of wall and gate and bolt and bar.
 This is a tough point, shrewd, redoubtable :
 Because we have to supplicate that judge 1345
 Shall overlook wrong done the judgment-seat.
 Now, I might suffer my own nose be pulled,
 As man : but then as father . . . if the Fisc
 Touched one hair of my boy who held my hand
 In confidence he could not come to harm 1350
 Crossing the Corso, at my own desire,
 Going to see those bodies in the church—
 What would you say to that, Don Hyacinth ?
 This is the sole and single knotty point :
 For, bid Tommati blink his interest, 1355
 You laud his magnanimity the while :
 But baulk Tommati's office,—he talks big !
 “ My predecessors in the place, — those sons
 “ O' the prophets that may hope succeed me here, —
 “ Shall I diminish their prerogative ? 1360
 “ Count Guido Franceschini's honour !—well,
 “ Has the Governor of Rome none ? ”

You perceive,
 The cards are all against us. Make a push,
 Kick over table, as shrewd gamesters do ! 1365
 We, do you say, encroach upon the rights,
 Deny the omnipotence o' the Judge forsooth ?

We, who have only been from first to last
Intending that his purpose should prevail,
Nay more, at times, anticipating it
At risk of his rebuke?

Yes, here the eruptive wrath with full effect !
How, did not indignation chain my tongue,
Could I repel this last, worst charge of all !
(There is a porcupine to barbacue ;
Gigia can jug a rabbit well enough,
With sour-sweet sauce and pine-pips ; but, good
Lord,

Suppose the devil instigate the wench
To stew, not roast him? Stew my porcupine?
If she does, I know where his quills shall stick! 1390
Come, I must go myself and see to things :
(I cannot stay much longer stewing here.)
Our stomach . . . I mean, our soul is stirred
within,

And we want words. We wounded Majesty?
Fall under such a censure, we?—who yearned
So much that Majesty dispel the cloud
And shine on us with healing on her wings,
That we prayed Pope *Majestas'* very self
To anticipate a little the tardy Jack,

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK VIII

Bell us forth deep the authoritative bay 1400
 Should start the beagles into sudden yelp
 Unisonous,—and, Gospel leading Law,
 Grant there assemble in our own behoof
 A Congregation, a particular Court,
 A few picked friends of quality and place, 1405
 To hear the several matters in dispute,—
 Causes big, little and indifferent,
 Bred of our marriage like a mushroom-growth,—
 All at once (can one brush off such too soon?)
 And so with laudable despatch decide 1410
 Whether we, in the main (to sink detail)
 Were one the Pope should hold fast or let go.
 “What, take the credit from the Law?” you
 ask?
 Indeed, we did! Law ducks to Gospel here :
 Why should Law gain the glory and pronounce 1415
 A judgment shall immortalize the Pope?
 Yes : our self-abnegating policy
 Was Joab’s—we would rouse our David’s sloth,
 Bid him encamp against a city, sack
 A place whereto ourselves had long laid siege, 1420
 Lest, taking it at last, it take our name
 Nor be styled *Innocentinopolis*.
 But no! The modesty was in alarm,
 The temperance refused to interfere,
 Returned us our petition with the word 1425
 “*Ad iudices suos*,” “Leave him to his Judge!”
 As who should say “Why trouble my repose?”
 “Why consult Peter in a simple case,
 “Peter’s wife’s sister in her fever-fit
 “Might solve as readily as the Apostle’s self? 1430
 “Are my Tribunals posed by aught so plain?
 “Hath not my Court a conscience? It is of
 age,
 “Ask it!”

BOOK VIII DOMINUS HYACINTHUS

We do ask,—but, inspire reply
 To the Court thou bidst me ask, as I have asked— 1435
 Oh thou, who vigilantly dost attend
 To even the few, the ineffectual words
 Which rise from this our low and mundane sphere
 Up to thy region out of smoke and noise,
 Seeking corroboration from thy nod 1440
 Who art all justice—which means mercy too,
 In a low noisy smoky world like ours
 Where Adam's sin made peccable his seed !
 We venerate the father of the flock,
 Whose last faint sands of life, the frittered gold, 1445
 Fall noiselessly, yet all too fast, o' the cone
 And tapering heap of those collected years :
 Never have these been hurried in their flow,
 Tho'agn justice fain would jog reluctant arm,
 In eagerness to take the forfeiture 1450
 Of guilty life : much less shall mercy sue
 In vain that thou let innocence survive,
 Precipitate no minim of the mass
 O' the all-so precious moments of thy life,
 By pushing Guido into death and doom ! 1455

(Our Cardinal engages to go read
 The Pope my speech, and point its beauties out.
 They say, the Pope has one half-hour, in twelve,
 Of something like a moderate return
 Of the intellectuals,—never much to lose ! 1460
 If I adroitly plant this passage there,
 The Fisc will find himself forestalled, I think,
 Though he stand, beat till the old ear-drum break !
 —Ah, boy of my own bowels, Hyacinth,
 Wilt ever catch the knack, requite the pains 1465
 Of poor papa, become proficient too
 I' the how and why and when, the time to laugh,
 The time to weep, the time, again, to pray,

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK VIII

And all the times prescribed by Holy Writ ?
Well, well, we fathers can but care, but cast 1470
Our bread upon the waters !)

In a word,
These secondary charges go to ground,
Since secondary, and superfluous,—motes
Quite from the main point : we did all and some, 1475
Little and much, adjunct and principal,
Causa honoris. Is there such a cause
As the sake of honour ? By that sole test try
Our action, nor demand if more or less,
Because of the action's mode, we merit blame 1480
Or may-be deserve praise ! The Court decides.
Is the end lawful ? It allows the means :
What we may do, we may with safety do,
And what means "safety" we ourselves must
judge.

Put case a person wrongs me past dispute : 1485
If my legitimate vengeance be a blow,
Mistrusting my bare arm can deal that blow,
I claim co-operation of a stick ;
Doubtful if stick be tough, I crave a sword ;
Diffident of ability in fence, 1490
I fee a friend, a swordsman to assist :
Take one—he may be coward, fool or knave :
Why not take fifty ?—and if these exceed
I' the due degree of drubbing, whom accuse
But the first author of the aforesaid wrong 1495
Who put poor me to such a world of pains ?
Surgery would have just excised a wart ;
The patient made such pother, struggled so
That the sharp instrument sliced nose and all.
Taunt us not that our friends performed for pay ! 1500
Ourselves had toiled for simple honour's sake :
But country clowns want dirt they comprehend,
The piece of gold ! Our reasons, which suffice

BOOK VIII DOMINUS HYACINTHUS

Ourselves, be ours alone ; our piece of gold
 Be, to the rustic, reason he approves !
 We must translate our motives like our speech,
 Into the lower phrase that suits the sense
 O' the limitedly apprehensive. Let
 Each level have its language ! Heaven speaks
 first

To the angel, then the angel tames the word 1510
Down to the ear of Tobit : he, in turn,
Diminishes the message to his dog,
And finally that dog finds how the flea
(Which else, importunate, might check his speed)
Shall learn its hunger must have holiday 1515
By application of his tongue or paw :
So many varied sorts of language here,
Each following each with pace to match the step,
Haud passibus aequis !

Talking of which flea, 1520

Reminds me I must put in special word
For the poor humble following,—the four friends,
Sicari, our assassins caught and caged.
(Ourselves are safe in your approval now :
Yet must we care for our companions, plead 1525
The cause o' the poor, the friends (of old-world
faith)

Who lie in tribulation for our sake.
Pauperum Procurator is my style :
 I stand forth as the poor man's advocate :
 And when we treat of what concerns the poor, 1530
Et cum agatur de pauperibus,
 In bondage, *carceratis*, for their sake,
In eorum causis, natural piety,
Pietas, ever ought to win the day,
Triumphare debet, quia ipsi sunt, 1535
 Because those very paupers constitute,

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK VIII

Thesaurus Christi, all the wealth of Christ.
 Nevertheless I shall not hold you long
 With multiplicity of proofs, nor burn
 Candle at noon-tide, clarify the clear. 1540
 There beams a case refulgent from our books—
 Castrensis, Butringarius, everywhere
 I find it burn to dissipate the dark.
 'T is this : a husband had a friend, which friend
 Seemed to him over-friendly with his wife 1545
 In thought and purpose,—I pretend no more.
 To justify suspicion or dispel,
 He bids his wife make show of giving heed,
 Semblance of sympathy—propose, in fine,
 A secret meeting in a private place. 1550
 The friend, enticed thus, finds an ambuscade,
 To-wit, the husband posted with a pack
 Of other friends, who fall upon the first
 And beat his love and life out both at once.
 These friends were brought to question for their
 help ; 1555
 Law ruled “The husband being in the right,
 “Who helped him in the right can scarce be
 wrong”—
Opinio, an opinion every way,
Multum tenenda cordi, heart should hold !
 When the inferiors follow as befits 1560
 The lead o' the principal, they change their name,
 And, *non dicuntur*, are no longer called
 His mandatories, *mandatorii*,
 But helpmates, *sed auxiliores* ; since
 To that degree does honour' sake lend aid, 1565
Adeo honoris causa est efficax,
 That not alone, *non solum*, does it pour
 Itself out, *se diffundat*, on mere friends
 We bring to do our bidding of this sort,
In mandatorios simplices, but sucks 1570

BOOK VIII DOMINUS HYACINTHUS

Along with it in wide and generous whirl,
Sed etiam assassinii qualitate
Qualificatos, people qualified
 By the quality of assassination's self,
 Dare I make use of such neologism, 1575
Ut utar verbo.

Haste we to conclude.

Of the other points that favour, leave some few
 For Spreti; such as the delinquents' youth.
 One of them falls short, by some months, of age 1580
 Fit to be managed by the gallows; two
 May plead exemption from our law's award,
 Being foreigners, subjects of the Granduke—
 I spare that bone to Spreti, and reserve
 Myself the juicier breast of argument— 1585
 Flinging the breast blade i' the face o' the Fisc
 Who furnished me the tid-bit: he must needs
 Play off his privilege and rack the clowns,—
 And they, at instance of the rack, confess
 All four unanimously made resolve,— 1590
 The night o' the murder, in brief minute snatched
 Behind the back of Guido as he fled,—
 That, since he had not kept his promise, paid
 The money for the murder on the spot,
 So, reaching home again, might please ignore 1595
 The pact or pay them in improper coin,—
 They one and all resolved, these hopeful friends,
 'T were best inaugurate the morrow's light,
 Nature recruited with her due repose,
 By killing Guido as he lay asleep 1600
 Pillowed on wallet which contained their fee.

I thank the Fisc for knowledge of this fact:
 What fact could hope to make more manifest
 Their rectitude, Guido's integrity?

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK VIII

For who fails recognize the touching truth 1605
 That these poor rustics bore no envy, hate,
 Malice nor yet uncharitableness
 Against the people they had put to death?
 In them, did such an act reward itself?
 All done was to deserve the simple pay, 1610
 Obtain the bread clowns earn by sweat of brow,
 And missing which, they missed of everything—
 Hence claimed pay, even at expense of life
 To their own lord, so little warped (admire!)
 By prepossession, such the absolute 1615
 Instinct of equity in rustic souls!
 Whereas our Count, the cultivated mind,
 He, wholly rapt in his serene regard
 Of honour, he contemplating the sun
 Who hardly marks if taper blink below, — 1620
 He, dreaming of no argument for death
 Except a vengeance worthy noble hearts,—
 Dared not so desecrate the deed, forsooth,
 Vulgarize vengeance, as defray its cost
 By money dug from out the dirty earth, 1625
 Irritant mere, in Ovid's phrase, to ill.
 What though helured base hinds by lucre's hope,—
 The only motive they could masticate,
 Milk for babes, not strong meat which men
 require?
 The deed done, those coarse hands were soiled 1630
 enough,
 He spared them the pollution of the pay.
 So much for the allegement, thine, my Fisc,
Quo nil absurdius, than which nought more mad,
Excogitari potest, may be squeezed
 From out the cogitative brain of thee! 1635
 And now, thou excellent the Governor!
 (Push to the peroration) *cæterum*
Enixe supplico, I strive in prayer,

BOOK VIII DOMINUS HYACINTHUS

Ut dominis meis, that unto the Court,
Benigna fronte, with a gracious brow, 1640
Et oculis serenis, and mild eyes,
Perpendere placeat, it may please them weigh,
Quod dominus Guido, that our noble Count,
Occidit, did the killing in dispute,
Ut ejus honor tumulatus, that 1645
 The honour of him buried fathom-deep
 In infamy, *in infamia*, might arise,
Resurgeret, as ghost breaks sepulchre !
Occidit, for he killed, *uxorem*, wife,
Quia illi fuit, since she was to him, 1650
Opprobrio, a disgrace and nothing more !
Et genitores, killed her parents too,
Qui, who, *postposita verecundia*,
 Having thrown off all sort of decency,
Filiam repudiarent, had renounced 1655
 Their daughter, *atque declarare non*
Erubuerunt, nor felt blush tinge cheek,
 Declaring, *meretricis genitam*
Esse, she was the offspring of a drab,
Ut ipse dehonestaretur, just 1660
 That so himself might lose his social rank !
Cujus mentem, and which daughter's heart and
 soul,
 They, *perverterunt*, turned from the right course,
Et ad illicitos amores non
Dumtaxat pellexerunt, and to love 1665
 Not simply did alluringly incite,
Sed vi obedientie, but by force
 O' the duty, *filialis*, daughters owe,
Coegerunt, forced and drove her to the deed :
Occidit, I repeat he killed the clan, 1670
Ne scilicet amplius in dedecore,
 Lest peradventure longer life might trail
Vivcret, link by link his turpitude,

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK VIII

Invisus consanguineis, hateful so
 To kith and kindred, *a nobilibus* 1675
Notatus, shunned by men of quality,
Relictus ab amicis, left i' the lurch
 By friends, *ab omnibus derisus*, turned
 A common hack-block to try edge of jokes.
Occidit, and he killed them here in Rome, 1680
In Urbe, the Eternal City, Sirs,
Nempe quæ alias spectata est,
 The appropriate theatre which witnessed once,
Matronam nobilem, Lucretia's self,
Abluere pudicitiae maculas, 1685
 Wash off the spots of her pudicity,
Sanguine proprio, with her own pure blood ;
Quæ vidit, and which city also saw,
Patrem, Virginius, *undequaque*, quite,
Impunem, with no sort of punishment, 1690
 Nor, *et non illaudatum*, lacking praise,
Sed polluentem parricidio,
 Imbrue his hands with butchery, *filiae*,
 Of chaste Virginia, to avoid a rape,
Ne raperetur ad stupra ; so to heart, 1695
Tanti illi cordi fuit, did he take,
Suspicio, the mere fancy men might have,
Honoris amittendi, of fame's loss,
Ut potius voluerit filia
Orbari, he preferred to lose his child, 1700
Quam illa incederet, rather than she walk
 The ways an, *inhonesta*, child disgraced,
Licet non sponte, though against her will.
Occidit—killed them, I reiterate—
In propria domo, in their own abode, 1705
Ut adultera et parentes, that each wretch,
Conscii agnoscerent, might both see and say,
Nullum locum, there 's no place, *nullumque esse*
Asylum, nor yet refuge of escape,

BOOK VIII DOMINUS HYACINTHUS

Impenetrabilem, shall serve as bar, 1710
Honori læso, to the wounded one
 In honour ; *neve ibi opprobria*
Continuarentur, killed them on the spot,
 Moreover, dreading lest within those walls
 The opprobrium peradventure be prolonged. 1715
Et domus quæ testis fuit turpium,
 And that the domicile which witnessed crime,
Esset et pænæ, might watch punishment :
Occidit, killed, I round you in the ears,
Quia alio modo, since by other mode, 1720
Non poterat ejus existimatio,
 There was no possibility his fame,
Læsa, gashed griesly, *tam enormiter*,
Ducere cicatrices, might be healed :
Occidit ut exemplum præberet 1725
Uxoribus, killed her, so to lesson wives
Jura conjugum, that the marriage-oath,
Esse servanda, must be kept henceforth :
Occidit denique, killed her, in a word,
Ut pro posse honestus viveret, 1730
 That he, please God, might creditably live,
Sin minus, but if fate willed otherwise,
Proprii honoris, of his outraged fame,
Offensi, by Mannaia, if you please,
Commiscranda victima caderet, 1735
 The pitiable victim he should fall !

Done ! I' the rough, i' the rough ! But done !

And, lo,
 Landed and stranded lies my very speech,
 My miracle, my monster of defence—
 Leviathan into the nose whereof 1740
 I have put fish-hook, pierced his jaw with thorn,
 And given him to my maidens for a play !
 I' the rough : to-morrow I review my piece,

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK VIII

Tame here and there undue floridity.
 It 's hard : you have to plead before these priests 1745
 And poke at them with Scripture, or you pass
 For heathen and, what 's worse, for ignorant
 O' the quality o' the Court and what it likes
 By way of illustration of the law.
 To-morrow stick in this, and throw out that, 1750
 And, having first ecclesiasticized,
 Regularize the whole, next emphasize,
 Then latinize, and lastly Cicero-ize,
 Giving my Fisc his finish. 'There 's my speech !
 And where 's my fry, and family and friends ? 1755
 Where 's that huge Hyacinth I mean to hug
 Till he cries out, "*Jam satis !* Let me breathe !"

Now, what an evening have I earned to-day !
 Hail, ye true pleasures, all the rest are false !
 Oh the old mother, oh the fattish wife ! 1760
 Rogue Hyacinth shall put on paper toque,
 And wrap himself around with mamma's veil
 Done up to imitate papa's black robe,
 (I 'm in the secret of the comedy,—
 Part of the program leaked out long ago !) 1765
 And call himself the Advocate o' the Poor,
 Mimic Don fâther that defends the Count :
 And for reward shall have a small full glass
 Of manly red rosolio to himself,
 —Always provided that he conjugate 1770
Bibo, I drink, correctly—nor be found
 Make the *perfectum*, *bipsi*, as last year !
 How the ambitious do so harden heart
 As lightly hold by these home-sanctitudes,
 To me is matter of bewilderment— 1775
 Bewilderment ! Because ambition's range
 Is nowise tethered by domestic tie.
 Am I refused an outlet from my home
 To the world's stage?—whereon a man should play

BOOK VIII DOMINUS HYACINTHUS

The man in public, vigilant for law, 1780
 Zealous for truth, a credit to his kind,
 Nay,—since, employing talent so, I yield
 The Lord His own again with usury,—
 A satisfaction, yea, to God Himself!

Well, I have modelled me by Agur's wish, 1785
 "Remove far from me vanity and lies,

"Feed me with food convenient for me!" What
 I' the world should a wise man require beyond?
 Can I but coax the good fat little wife

To tell her fool of a father the mad prank 1790

His scapegrace nephew played this time last year
 At Carnival! He could not choose, I think,
 But modify that inconsiderate gift

O' the cup and cover (somewhere in the will
 Under the pillow, someone seems to guess) 1795

—Correct that clause in favour of a boy
 The trifle ought to grace, with name engraved,
 Would look so well, produced in future years
 To pledge a memory, when poor papa
 Latin and law are long since laid at rest— 1800

Hyacintho dono dedit avus! Why,
 The wife should get a necklace for her pains,
 The very pearls that made Violante proud,
 And Pietro pawned for half their value once,—
 Redeemable by somebody, *ne sit* 1805

Marita quæ rotundioribus

Onusta mammis . . . baccis ambulet:

Her bosom shall display the big round balls,
 No braver proudly borne by wedded wife!

With which Horatian promise I conclude. 1810

Into the pigeon-hole with thee, my speech!
 Off and away, first work then play, play, play!
 Bottini, burn thy books, thou blazing ass!
 Sing "Tra-la-la, for, lambkins, we must live!"

IX.—JURIS DOCTOR JOHANNES- BAPTISTA BOTTINIUS

FISCI ET REV. CAM. APOSTOL. ADVOCATUS

HAD I God's leave, how I would alter things !
If I might read instead of print my speech,—
Ay, and enliven speech with many a flower
Refuses obstinate to blow in print,
As wildings planted in a prim parterre, - - 5
This scurvy room were turned an immense hall ;
Opposite, fifty judges in a row ;
This side and that of me, for audience—Rome :
And, where yon window is, the Pope should hide—
Watch, curtained, but peep visibly enough. 10
A buzz of expectation ! Through the crowd,
Jingling his chain and stumping with his staff,
Up comes an usher, louts him low, "The Court
"Requires the allocution of the Fisc !"
I rise, I bend, I look about me, pause 15
O'er the hushed multitude: I count—One, two——

Have ye seen, Judges, have ye, lights of law,—
When it may hap some painter, much in vogue
Throughout our city nutritive of arts,
Ye summon to a task shall test his worth, 20
To manufacture, as he knows and can,
A work may decorate a palace-wall,
Afford my lords their Holy Family,—

BK. IX JOHANNES-BAPTISTA BOTTINIUS

Hath it escaped the acumen of the Court
 How such a painter sets himself to paint? 25
 Suppose that Joseph, Mary and her Babe
 A-journeying to Egypt, prove the piece :
 Why, first he sedulously practiseth,
 This painter,—girding loin and lighting lamp,—
 On what may nourish eye, make facile hand ; 30
 Getteth him studies (styled by draughtsmen so)
 From some assistant corpse of Jew or Turk
 Or, haply, Molinist, he cuts and carves,—
 This Luca or this Carlo or the like.
 To him the bones their inmost secret yield, 35
 Each notch and nodule signify their use :
 On him the muscles turn, in triple tier,
 And pleasantly entreat the entrusted man
 “Familiarize thee with our play that lifts
 “Thus, and thus lowers again, leg, arm and foot!” 40
 —Ensuring due correctness in the nude.
 Which done, is all done? Not a whit, ye know !
 He,—to art’s surface rising from her depth,—
 If some flax-polled soft-bearded sire be found,
 May simulate a Joseph, (happy chance !)— 45
 Limneth exact each wrinkle of the brow,
 Loseth no involution, cheek or chap,
 Till lo, in black and white, the senior lives ‘
 Is it a young and comely peasant-nurse
 That poseth? (be the phrase accorded me !) 50
 Each feminine delight of florid lip,
 Eyes brimming o’er and brow bowed down with
 love,
 Marmoreal neck and bosom uberous,—
 Glad on the paper in a trice they go
 To help his notion of the Mother-maid : 55
 Methinks I see it, chalk a little stumped !
 Yea and her babe—that flexure of soft limbs,
 That budding face imbued with dewy sleep,

THE RING AND THE BOOK BK. IX

Contribute each an excellence to Christ.
 Nay, since he humbly lent companionship, 60
 Even the poor ass, unpanniered and elate
 Stands, perks an ear up, he a model too ;
 While clouted shoon, staff, scrip and water-
 gourd,—
 Aught may betoken travel, heat and haste,—
 No jot nor tittle of these but in its turn 65
 Ministers to perfection of the piece :
 Till now, such piece before him, part by part,—
 Such prelude ended,—pause our painter may,
 Submit his fifty studies one by one,
 And in some sort boast “ I have served my lords.” 70

But what ? And hath he painted once this while ?
 Or when ye cry “ Produce the thing required,
 “ Show us our picture shall rejoice its niche,
 “ Thy Journey through the Desert done in oils ! ” —
 What, doth he fall to shuffling 'mid his sheets, 75
 Fumbling for first this, then the other fact
 Consigned to paper,—“ studies,” bear the term !—
 And stretch a canvas, mix a pot of paste,
 And fasten here a head and there a tail,
 (The ass hath one, my Judges !) so dove-tail 80
 Or, rather, ass-tail in, piece sorrily out—
 By bits of reproduction of the life—
 The picture, the expected Family ?
 I trow not ! do I miss with my conceit
 The mark, my lords ?—not so my lords were served ! 85
 Rather your artist turns abrupt from these,
 And preferably buries him and broods
 (Quite away from aught vulgar and extern)
 On the inner spectrum, filtered through the eye,
 His brain-deposit, bred of many a drop, 90
E pluribus unum : and the wiser he !
 For in that brain,—their fancy sees at work,

BK. IX JOHANNES-BAPTISTA BOTTINIUS

Could my lords peep indulged,—results alone,
 Not processes which nourish such results,
 Would they discover and appreciate,—life 95
 Fed by digestion, not raw food itself,
 No gobbets but smooth comfortable chyme
 Secreted from each snapped-up crudity,—
 Less distinct, part by part, but in the whole
 Truer to the subject,—the main central truth 100
 And soul o' the picture, would my Judges spy,—
 Not those mere fragmentary studied facts
 Which answer to the outward frame and flesh—
 Not this nose, not that eyebrow, the other fact
 Of man's staff, woman's stole or infant's clout, 105
 But lo, a spirit-birth conceived of flesh,
 Truth rare and real, not transcripts, fact and false.
 The studies—for his pupils and himself!
 The picture be for our eximious Rome
 And—who knows?—satisfy its Governor, 110
 Whose new wing to the villa he hath bought
 (God give him joy of it) by Capena, soon
 ('T is bruited) shall be glowing with the brush
 Of who hath long surpassed the Florentine,
 The Urbinate and . . . what if I dared add, 115
 Even his master, yea the Cortonese, --
 I mean the accomplished *Ciro Ferri*, *Sirs*!
 (-Did not he die? I'll see before I prin..)

End we exordium, Phœbus plucks my ear!
 Thus then, just so and no whit otherwise, 120
 Have I,—engaged as I were *Ciro's* self,
 To paint a parallel, a Family,
 The patriarch *Pietro* with his wise old wife
 To boot (as if one introduced *Saint Anne*
 By bold conjecture to complete the group) 125
 And juvenile *Pompilia* with her babe,
 Who, seeking safety in the wilderness,

THE RING AND THE BOOK BK. IX

Were all surprised by Herod, while outstretched
 In sleep beneath a palm-tree by a spring,
 And killed—the very circumstance I paint, 130
 Moving the pity and terror of my lords—
 Exactly so have I, a month at least,
 Your Fiscal, made me cognizant of facts,
 Searched out, pried into, pressed the meaning forth
 Of every piece of evidence in point, 135
 How bloody Herod slew these innocents,—
 Until the glad result is gained, the group
 Demonstrably presented in detail,
 Their slumber and his onslaught, - like as life.
 Yea and, availing me of help allowed 140
 By law, discreet provision lest my lords
 Be too much troubled by effrontery,—
 The rack, law plies suspected crime withal -
 (Law that hath listened while the lyrist sang
 "*Lene tormentum ingenio admovet*," 145
 Gently thou joggest by a twinge the wit,
 "*Plerumque duro*," else were slow to blab !)
 Through this concession my full cup runs o'er :
 The guilty owns his guilt without reserve.
 Therefore by part and part I clutch my case 150
 Which, in entirety now,—momentous task,—
 My lords demand, so render them I must,
 Since, one poor pleading more and I have done.
 But shall I ply my papers, play my proofs,
 Parade my studies, fifty in a row, 155
 As though the Court were yet in pupilage,
 Claimed not the artist's ultimate appeal ?
 Much rather let me soar the height prescribed
 And, bowing low, proffer my picture's self !
 No more of proof, disproof,—such virtue was, 160
 Such vice was never in Pompilia, now !
 Far better say "Behold Pompilia !" —(for
 I leave the family as unmanageable,

BK. IX JOHANNES-BAPTISTA BOTTINIUS

And stick to just one portrait, but life-size.)
 Hath calumny imputed to the fair 165
 A blemish, mole on cheek or wart on chin,
 Much more, blind hidden horrors best unnamed?
 Shall I descend to prove you, point by point,
 Never was knock-knee known nor splay-foot found
 In Phryne? (I must let the portrait go, 170
 Content me with the model, I believe)—
 —I prove this? An indignant sweep of hand,
 Dash at and doing away with drapery,
 And, —use you eyes, Athenians, smooth she smiles!
 Or, —since my client can no longer smile, 175
 And more appropriate instances abound, —
 What is this Tale of Tarquin, how the slave
 Was caught by him, preferred to Collatine?
 Thou, even from thy corpse-clothes virginal,
 Look'st the lie dead, Lucretia! 180

Thus at least

I, by the guidance of antiquity,
 (Our one infallible guide) now operate,
 Sure that the innocence thus shown is safe;
 Sure, too, that, while I plead, the echoes cry 185
 (Lend my weak voice thy trump, sonorous Fame!)
 “Monstrosity the Phrynean shape shall mar,
 “Lucretia's soul comport with Tarquin's lie,
 “When thistles grow on vines or thorns yield figs,
 “Or oblique sentence leave this judgment-seat!” 190

A great theme : may my strength be adequate !
 For — paint Pompilia, dares my feebleness?
 How did I unaware engage so much
 — Find myself undertaking to produce
 A faultless nature in a flawless form? 195
 What 's here? Oh, turn aside nor dare the blaze
 Of such a crown, such constellation, say,
 As jewels here thy front, Humanity!

THE RING AND THE BOOK BK. IX

First, infancy, pellucid as a pearl ;
 Then childhood—stone which, dew-drop at the first, 200
 (An old conjecture) sucks, by dint of gaze,
 Blue from the sky and turns to sapphire so :
 Yet both these gems eclipsed by, last and best,
 Womanliness and wifehood opaline,
 Its milk-white pallor, - chastity,—suffused 205
 With here and there a tint and hint of flame,—
 Desire,—the lapidary loves to find.
 Such jewels bind conspicuously thy brow,
 Pompilia, infant, child, maid, woman, wife—
 Crown the ideal in our earth at last ! 210
 What should a faculty like mine do here ?
 Close eyes, or else, the rashlier hurry hand !

Which is to say,—lose no time but begin !
Sermocinando ne declamem, Sirs,
Ultra clepsydrum, as our preachers smile, 215
 Lest I exceed my hour-glass. Whereupon,
 As Flaccus prompts, I dare the epic plunge—
 Begin at once with marriage, up till when
 Little or nothing would arrest your love,
 In the easeful life o' the lady ; lamb and lamb, 220
 How do they differ ? Know one, you know all
 Manners of maidenhood : mere maiden she.
 And since all lambs are like in more than fleece,
 Prepare to find that, lamb-like, she too frisks—
 O' the weaker sex, my lords, the weaker sex ! 225
 To whom, the Teian teaches us, for gift,
 Not strength,—man's dower,—but beauty, nature
 gave,
 “ Beauty in lieu of spears, in lieu of shields ! ”
 And what is beauty's sure concomitant,
 Nay, intimate essential character, 230
 But melting wiles, deliciouslest deceits,
 The whole redoubted armoury of love ?

BOOK IX JOHANNES-BAPTISTA BOTTINIUS

Therefore of vernal pranks, dishevellings
 O' the hair of youth that dances April in,
 And easily-imagined Hebe-slips 235
 O'ersward which May makes over-smooth for foot—
 These shall we pry into?—or wiselier wink,
 Though numerous and dear they may have been?

For lo, advancing Hymen and his pomp!
Discedunt nunc amores, loves, farewell! 240
Mancat amor, let love, the sole, remain!
 Farewell to dewiness and prime of life!
 Remains the rough determined day: dance done,
 To work, with plough and harrow! What comes
 next?

'T is Guido henceforth guides Pompilia's step, 245
 Cries "No more friskings o'er the foodful glebe,
 "Else, 'ware the whip!" Accordingly,—first crack
 O' the thong,—we hear that his young wife was
 barred,

Cohibita fuit, from the old free life,
I'tam liberiores ducere. 250

Demur we? Nowise: heifer brave the hind?
 We seek not there should lapse the natural law,
 The proper piety to lord and king
 And husband: let the heifer bear the yoke!
 Only, I crave he cast not patience off, 255
 This hind; for deem you she endures the whip,
 Nor winces at the goad, nay, restive, kicks?
 What if the adversary's charge be just,
 And all untowardly she pursue her way
 With groan and grunt, though hind strike ne'er
 so hard? 260

If petulant remonstrance made appeal,
 Unseasonable, o'erprotracted,—if
 Importunate challenge taxed the public ear
 When silence more decorously had served

THE RING AND THE BOOK BK. IX

For protestation,—if Pompilian plaint 265
 Wrought but to aggravate Guidonian ire,—
 Why, such mishaps, ungainly though they be,
 Ever companion change, are incident
 To altered modes and novelty of life :
 The philosophic mind expects no less, 270
 Smilingly knows and names the crisis, sits
 Waiting till old things go and new arrive.
 Therefore, I hold a husband but inept
 Who turns impatient at such transit-time,
 As if this running from the rod would last ! 275

Since, even while I speak, the end is reached :
 Success awaits the soon-disheartened man.
 The parents turn their backs and leave the house,
 The wife may wail but none shall intervene :
 He hath attained his object, groom and bride 280
 Partake the nuptial bower no soul can see,
 Old things are passed and all again is new,
 Over and gone the obstacles to peace,
Novorum—tenderly the Mantuan turns
 The expression, some such purpose in his eye— 285
Nascitur ordo ! Every storm is laid,
 And forth from plain each pleasant herb may peep,
 Each bloom of wifehood in abeyance late :
 (Confer a passage in the Canticles.)

But what if, as 't is wont with plant and wife, 290
 Flowers,—after a suppression to good end,
 Still, when they do spring forth,—sprout here,
 spread there,
 Anywhere likelier than beneath the foot
 O' the lawful good-man gardener of the ground ?
 He dug and dibbled, sowed and watered,—still 295
 'T is a chance wayfarer shall pluck the increase.
 Just so, respecting persons not too much,

BK. IX JOHANNES-BAPTISTA BOTTINIUS

The lady, foes allege, put forth each charm
 And proper floweret of femininity
 To whosoever had a nose to smell 300
 Or breast to deck : what if the charge be true ?
 The fault were graver had she looked with choice,
 Fastidiously appointed who should grasp,
 Who, in the whole town, go without the prize !
 To nobody she destined donative, 305
 But, first come was first served, the accuser saith.
 Put case her sort of . . . in this kind . . . escapes
 Were many and oft and indiscriminate—
 Impute ye as the action were prepense,
 The gift particular, arguing malice so ? 310
 Which butterfly of the wide air shall brag
 “ I was preferred to Guido ”—when ’t is clear
 The cap, he quaffs at, lay with olent breast
 Open to gnat, midge, bee and moth as well ?
 One chalice entertained the company ; 315
 And if its peevish lord object the more,
 Mistake, misname such bounty in a wife,
 Haste we to advertise him—charm of cheek,
 Lustre of eye, allowance of the lip,
 All womanly components in a spouse, 320
 These are no household-bread each stranger’s bite
 Leaves by so much diminished for the mouth
 O’ the master of the house at supper-time :
 But rather like a lump of spice they lie,
 Morsel of myrrh, which scents the neighbourhood 325
 Yet greets its lord no lighter by a grain.

Nay, even so, he shall be satisfied !
 Concede we there was reason in his wrong,
 Grant we his grievance and content the man !
 For lo, Pompilia, she submits herself ; 330
 Ere three revolving years have crowned their
 course,

THE RING AND THE BOOK BK. IX

Off and away she puts this same reproach
 Of lavish bounty, inconsiderate gift
 O' the sweets of wifehood stored to other ends :
 No longer shall he blame "She none excludes," 335
 But substitute "She laudably sees all,
 "Searches the best out and selects the same."
 For who is here, long sought and latest found,
 Waiting his turn unmoved amid the whirl,
 "*Constans in levitate*,"—Ha, my lords? 340
 Calm in his levity,—indulge the quip !—
 Since 't is a levite bears the bell away,
 Parades him henceforth as Pompilia's choice.
 'T is no ignoble object, husband ! Doubt'st ?
 When here comes tripping Flaccus with his phrase 345
 "Trust me, no miscreant singled from the mob,
 "*Crede non illum tibi de scelestis*
 "*Plebe delectum*," but a man of mark,
 A priest, dost hear ? Why then, submit thyself !
 Priest, ay and very phœnix of such fowl, 350
 Well-born, of culture, young and vigorous,
 Comely too, since precise the precept points—
 On the selected levite be there found
 Nor mole nor scar nor blemish, lest the mind
 Come all uncandid through the thwarting flesh ! 355
 Was not the son of Jesse ruddy, sleek,
 Pleasant to look on, pleasant every way ?
 Since well he smote the harp and sweetly sang,
 And danced till Abigail came out to see,
 And seeing smiled and smiling ministered 360
 The raisin-cluster and the cake of figs,
 With ready meal refreshed the gifted youth,
 Till Nabal, who was absent shearing sheep,
 Felt heart sink, took to bed (discreetly done—
 They might have been beforehand with him else) 365
 And died—would Guido had behaved as well !
 But ah, the faith of early days is gone,

BK. IX JOHANNES-BAPTISTA BOTTINIUS

Hæu prisca fides! Nothing died in him
 Save courtesy, good sense and proper trust,
 Which, when they ebb from souls they should
 o'erflow, 370
 Discover stub, weed, sludge and ugliness.
 (The Pope, we know, is Neapolitan
 And relishes a sea-side simile.)
 Deserted by each charitable wave,
 Guido, left high and dry, shows jealous now! 375
 Jealous avouched, paraded: tax the fool
 With any peccadillo, he responds
 "Truly I beat my wife through jealousy,
 "Imprisoned her and punished otherwise,
 "Being jealous: now would threaten, sword in
 hand, 380
 "Now manage to mix poison in her sight,
 "And so forth: jealously I dealt, in fine."
 Concede thus much, and what remains to prove?
 Have I to teach my masters what effect
 Hath jealousy, and how, befooling men, 385
 It makes false true, abuses eye and ear,
 Turns mere mist adamant, loads with sound
 Silence, and into void and vacancy
 Crowds a whole phalanx of conspiring foes?
 Therefore who owns "I watched with jealousy" 390
 "My wife," adds "for no reason in the world!"
 What need that, thus proved madman, he re-
 mark
 "The thing I thought a serpent proved an eel"—
 Perchance the right Comacchian, six foot length,
 And not an inch too long for that rare pie 395
 (Master Arcangeli has heard of such)
 Whose succulence makes fasting bearable;
 Meant to regale some moody splenetic
 Who, pleasing to mistake the donor's gift,
 Spying I know not what Lernæan snake 400

THE RING AND THE BOOK BK. IX

I' the luscious Lenten creature, stamps forsooth
The dainty in the dust.

Enough ! Prepare,

Such lunes announced, for downright lunacy !
Insanit homo, threat succeeds to threat, 405
And blow redoubles blow,—his wife, the block.
But, if a block, shall not she jar the hand
That buffets her ? The injurious idle stone
Rebounds and hits the head of him who flung.
Causeless rage breeds, i' the wife now, rageful
cause, 410
Tyranny wakes rebellion from its sleep.
Rebellion, say I ?—rather, self-defence,
Laudable wish to live and see good days,
Pricks our Pompilia now to fly the fool
By any means, at any price,—nay, more, 415
Nay, most of all, i' the very interest
O' the fool that, baffled of his blind desire
At any price, were truest victor so.
Shall he effect his crime and lose his soul ?
No, dictates duty to a loving wife ! 420
Far better that the unconsummate blow,
Adroitly baulked by her, should back again,
Correctively admonish his own pate !

Crime then,—the Court is with me?—she must
crush :
How crush it ? By all efficacious means ; 425
And these,—why, what in woman should they be ?
“With horns the bull, with teeth the lion fights ;
“To woman,” quoth the lyrist quoted late,
“Nor teeth, nor horns, but beauty, Nature gave.
Pretty i' the Pagan ! Who dares blame the use 430
Of armoury thus allowed for natural,—
Exclaim against a seeming-dubious play

BK. IX JOHANNES-BAPTISTA BOTTINIUS

O' the sole permitted weapon, spear and shield
 Alike, resorted to i' the circumstance
 By poor Pompilia? Grant she somewhat plied 435
 Arts that allure, the magic nod and wink,
 The witchery of gesture, spell of word,
 Whereby the likelier to enlist this friend,
 Yea stranger, as a champion on her side?
 Such man, being but mere man, ('t was all she
 knew), 440
 Must be made sure by beauty's silken bond,
 The weakness that subdues the strong, and bows
 Wisdom alike and folly. Grant the tale
 O' the husband, which is false, were proved and
 true
 To the letter—or the letters, I should say, 445
 Abominations he professed to find
 And fix upon Pompilia and the priest,—
 Allow them hers— for though she could not write,
 In early days of Eve-like innocence
 That plucked no apple from the knowledge-tree, 450
 Yet, at the Serpent's word, Eve plucks and eats
 And knows—especially how to read and write :
 And so Pompilia, as the move o' the maw,
 Quoth Persius, makes a parrot bid "Good day!"
 A crow salute the concave, and a pie 455
 Endeavour at proficiency in speech,—
 So she, through hunger after fellowship.
 May well have learned, though late, to play the
 scribe :
 As indeed, there 's one letter on the list
 Explicitly declares did happen here. 460
 "You thought my letters could be none of mine,"
 She tells her parents—"mine, who wanted skill ;
 "But now I have the skill, and write, you see!"
 She needed write love-letters, so she learned,
 "*Negatas artifex sequi voces*"—though 465

THE RING AND THE BOOK BK. IX

This letter nowise 'scapes the common lot,
 But lies i' the condemnation of the rest,
 Found by the husband's self who forged them all.
 Yet, for the sacredness of argument,
 For this once an exemption shall it plead— 470
 Anything, anything to let the wheels
 Of argument run glibly to their goal !
 Concede she wrote (which were preposterous)
 This and the other epistle,—what of it ?
 Where does the figment touch her candid fame ? 475
 Being in peril of her life—" my life,
 "Not an hour's purchase," as the letter runs,—
 And having but one stay in this extreme,
 Out of the wide world but a single friend—
 What could she other than resort to him, 480
 And how with any hope resort but thus ?
 Shall modesty dare bid a stranger brave
 Danger, disgrace, nay death in her behalf—
 Think to entice the sternness of the steel
 Yet spare love's loadstone moving manly mind ? 485
 —Most of all, when such mind is hampered so
 By growth of circumstance athwart the life
 O' the natural man, that decency forbids
 He stoop and take the common privilege,
 Say frank " I love," as all the vulgar do. 490
 A man is wedded to philosophy,
 Married to statesmanship ; a man is old ;
 A man is fettered by the foolishness
 He took for wisdom and talked ten years since ;
 A man is, like our friend the Canon here, 495
 A priest, and wicked if he break his vow :
 Shall he dare love, who may be Pope one day ?
 Despite the coil of such encumbrance here,
 Suppose this man could love, unhappily,
 And would love, dared he only let love show ! 500
 In case the woman of his love speaks first,

BK. IX JOHANNES-BAPTISTA BOTTINIUS

From what embarrassment she sets him free !

" 'T is I who break reserve, begin appeal,
 " Confess that, whether you love me or no,
 " I love you ! " What an ease to dignity, 505
 What help of pride from the hard high-backed
 chair

Down to the carpet where the kittens bask,
 All under the pretence of gratitude !

From all which, I deduce—the lady here
 Was bound to proffer nothing short of love 510
 To the priest whose service was to save her.
 What ?

Shall she propose him lucre, dust o' the mine,
 Rubbish o' the rock, some diamond, muckworms
 prize,

Some pearl secreted by a sickly fish ?
 Scarcely ! She caters for a generous taste. 515
 'T is love shall beckon, beauty bid to breast,
 Till all the Samson sink into the snare !
 Because, permit the end—permit therewith
 Means to the end !

How say you, good my lords ? 520

I hope you heard my adversary ring
 The changes on this precept : now, let me
 Reverse the peal ! *Quia dato luto fine,*
Ad illum assequendum ordinata
Non sunt damnanda media,—licit end 525
 Enough was found in mere escape from death,
 To legalize our means illicit else
 Of feigned love, false allurements, fancied fact.
 Thus Venus losing Cupid on a day,
 (See that *Idyllum Moschi*) seeking help, 530
 In the anxiety of motherhood,
 Allowably promised " Who shall bring report
 " Where he is wandered to, my winged babe,

THE RING AND THE BOOK BK. IX

"I give him for reward a nectared kiss ;
 "But who brings safely back the truant's self, 535
 "His be a super-sweet makes kiss seem cold !"
 Are not these things writ for example-sake ?

To such permitted motive, then, refer
 All those professions, else were hard explain,
 Of hope, fear, jealousy, and the rest of love ! 540
 He is Myrtillus, Amaryllis she,
 She burns, he freezes,—all a mere device
 To catch and keep the man, may save her life,
 Whom otherwise nor catches she nor keeps !
 Worst, once, turns best now : in all faith, she
 feigns : 545

Feigning,—the liker innocence to guilt,
 The truer to the life in what she feigns !
 How if Ulysses,—when, for public good
 He sunk particular qualms and played the spy,
 Entered Troy's hostile gate in beggar's garb— 550
 How if he first had boggled at this clout,
 Grown dainty o'er that clack-dish ? Grime is
 grace
 To whoso gropes amid the dung for gold.

Hence, beyond promises, we praise each proof
 That promise was not simply made to break, 555
 Mere moonshine-structure meant to fade at dawn :
 We praise, as consequent and requisite,
 What, enemies allege, were more than words,
 Deeds—meetings at the window, twilight-trysts,
 Nocturnal entertainments in the dim 560
 Old labyrinthine palace ; lies, we know—
 Inventions we, long since, turned inside out.
 Must such external semblance of intrigue
 Demonstrate that intrigue there lurks perdue ?
 Does every hazel-sheath disclose a nut ? 565

BK. IX JOHANNES-BAPTISTA BOTTINIUS

He were a Molinist who dared maintain
 That midnight meetings in a screened alcove
 Must argue folly in a matron—since
 So would he bring a slur on Judith's self,
 Commended beyond women, that she lured 570
 The lustful to destruction through his lust.
 Pompilia took not Judith's liberty,
 No faulchion find you in her hand to smite,
 No damsel to convey in dish the head
 Of Holophernes,—style the Canon so— 575
 Or is it the Count? If I entangle me
 With my similitudes,—if wax wings melt,
 And earthward down I drop, not mine the fault :
 Blame your beneficence, O Court, O sun,
 Whereof the beamy smile affects my flight ! 580
 What matter, so Pompilia's fame revive
 I' the warmth that proves the bane of Icarus ?

Yea, we have shown it lawful, necessary
 Pompilia leave her husband, seek the house
 O' the parents: and because 'twixt home and home 585
 Lies a long road with many a danger rife,
 Lions by the way and serpents in the path,
 To rob and ravish,—much behoves she keep
 Each shadow of suspicion from fair fame,
 For her own sake much, but for his sake more, 590
 The ingrate husband's. Evidence shall be,
 Plain witness to the world how white she walks
 I' the mire she wanders through ere Rome she
 reach.

And who so proper witness as a priest ?
 Gainsay ye ? Let me hear who dares gainsay ! 595
 I hope we still can punish heretics !
 "Give me the man" I say with him of Gath,
 "That we may fight together !" None, I think :
 The priest is granted me.

THE RING AND THE BOOK BK. IX

Then, if a priest, 600
 One juvenile and potent : else, mayhap,
 That dragon, our Saint George would slay, slays
 him.

And should fair face accompany strong hand,
 The more complete equipment : nothing mars
 Work, else praiseworthy, like a bodily flaw 605
 I' the worker : as 't is said Saint Paul himself
 Deplored the check o' the puny presence, still
 Cheating his fulmination of its flash,
 Albeit the bolt therein went true to oak.

Therefore the agent, as prescribed, she takes,— 610
 Both juvenile and potent, handsome too,—
 In all obedience : “good,” you grant again.

Do you? I would you were the husband, lords !
 How prompt and facile might departure be !
 How boldly would Pompilia and the priest 615
 March out of door, spread flag at beat of drum,
 But that inapprehensive Guido grants
 Neither premiss nor yet conclusion here,
 And, purblind, dreads a bear in every bush !

For his own quietude and comfort, then, 620
 Means must be found for flight in masquerade
 At hour when all things sleep. —“Save jealousy !”

Right, Judges ! Therefore shall the lady's wit
 Supply the boon thwart nature baulks him of,
 And do him service with the potent drug 625
 (Helen's nepenthe, as my lords opine)

Which respites blessedly each fretted nerve
 O' the much-enduring man : accordingly,
 There lies he, duly dosed and sound asleep,
 Relieved of woes or real or raved about. 630

While soft she leaves his side, he shall not wake ;
 Nor stop who steals away to join her friend,
 Nor do him mischief should he catch that friend
 Intent on more than friendly office,—nay,

BK. IX JOHANNES-BAPTISTA BOTTINIUS

Nor get himself raw head and bones laid bare 635
In payment of his apparition !

Thus

Would I defend the step,—were the thing true
Which is a fable,—see my former speech,—
That Guido slept (who never slept a wink) 640
Through treachery, an opiate from his wife,
Who not so much as knew what opiates mean.

Now she may start : or hist,—a stoppage still !
A journey is an enterprise of cost !
As in campaigns, we fight but others pay, 645
Suis expensis, nemo militat.

'T is Guido's self we guard from accident,
Ensuring safety to Pompilia, versed
Nowise in misadventures by the way,
Hard riding and rough quarters, the rude fare, 650
The unready host. What magic mitigates
Each plague of travel to the unpractised wife ?
Money, sweet Sirs ! And were the fiction fact
She helped herself thereto with liberal hand
From out her husband's store,—what fitter use 655
Was ever husband's money destined to ?
With bag and baggage thus did Dido once
Decamp,—for more authority, a queen !

So is she fairly on her route at last,
Prepared for either fortune : nay and if 660
The priest, now all a-glow with enterprise,
Cool somewhat presently when fades the flush
O' the first adventure, clouded o'er belike
By doubts, misgivings how the day may die,
Though born with such auroral brilliance,—if 665
The brow seem over-pensive and the lip
'Gin lag and lose the prattle lightsome late,—

THE RING AND THE BOOK BK. IX

Vanquished by tedium of a prolonged jaunt
 In a close carriage o'er a jolting road,
 With only one young female substitute 670
 For seventeen other Canons of ripe age
 Were wont to keep him company in church,—
 Shall not Pompilia haste to dissipate
 The silent cloud that, gathering, bodes her bale?—
 Prop the irresoluteness may portend 675
 Suspension of the project, check the flight,
 Bring ruin on them both? Use every means,
 Since means to the end are lawful! What i' the way
 Of wile should have allowance like a kiss
 Sagely and sisterly administered, 680
Sororia saltem oscula? We find
 Such was the remedy her wit applied
 To each incipient scruple of the priest,
 If we believe,—as, while my wit is mine
 I cannot,—what the driver testifies, 685
 Borsi, called Venerino, the mere tool
 Of Guido and his friend the Governor,—
 Avowal I proved wrung from out the wretch,
 After long rotting in imprisonment,
 As price of liberty and favour: long 690
 They tempted, he at last succumbed, and lo
 Counted them out full tale each kiss and more,
 "The journey being one long embrace," quoth he.
 Still, though we should believe the driver's lie,
 Nor even admit as probable excuse, 695
 Right reading of the riddle,—as I urged
 In my first argument, with fruit perhaps—
 That what the owl-like eyes (at back of head!)
 O' the driver, drowsed by driving night and day,
 Supposed a vulgar interchange of lips, 700
 This was but innocent jog of head 'gainst head,
 Cheek meeting jowl as apple may touch pear
 From branch and branch contiguous in the wind,

BK. IX JOHANNES-BAPTISTA BOTTINIUS

When Autumn blusters and the orchard rocks :—
That rapid run and the rough road were cause 705
O' the casual ambiguity, no harm
I' the world to eyes awake and penetrative.
Say,—not to grasp a truth I can release
And safely fight without, yet conquer still,—
Say, she kissed him, say, he kissed her again ! 710
Such osculation was a potent means,
A very efficacious help, no doubt :
Such with a third part of her nectar did
Venus imbue : why should Pompilia fling
The poet's declaration in his teeth ?— 715
Pause to employ what—since it had success,
And kept the priest her servant to the end—
We must presume of energy enough,
No whi superfluous, so permissible ?

The goal is gained : day, night and yet a day 720
Have run their round : a long and devious road
Is traversed,—many manners, various men
Passed in review, what cities did they see,
What hamlets mark, what profitable food
For after-meditation cull and store ! 725
'Till Rome, that Rome whereof—this voice
Would it might make our Molinists observe,
That she is built upon a rock nor shall
Their powers prevail against her !—Rome, I say,
Is all but reached ; one stage more and they stop 730
Saved : pluck up heart, ye pair, and forward, then !

Ah, Nature—baffled she recurs, alas !
Nature imperiously exacts her due,
Spirit is willing but the flesh is weak :
Pompilia needs must acquiesce and swoon, 735
Give hopes alike and fears a breathing-while.
The innocent sleep soundly : sound she sleeps,

THE RING AND THE BOOK BK. IX

So let her slumber, then, unguarded save
 By her own chastity, a triple mail,
 And his good hand whose stalwart arms have borne 740
 The sweet and senseless burthen like a babe
 From coach to couch, —the serviceable strength !
 Nay, what and if he gazed rewardedly
 On the pale beauty prisoned in embrace,
 Stooped over, stole a balmy breath perhaps 745
 For more assurance sleep was not decease—
 “ *Ut vidi*,” “how I saw !” succeeded by
 “ *Ut perii*,” “how I sudden lost my brains !”
 —What harm ensued to her unconscious quite ?
 For, curiosity—how natural ! 750
 Importunateness—what a privilege
 In the ardent sex ! And why curb ardour here ?
 How can the priest but pity whom he saved ?
 And pity is so near to love, and love
 So neighbourly to all unreasonableness ! 755
 As to love’s object, whether love were sage
 Or foolish, could Pompilia know or care,
 Being still sound asleep, as I premised ?
 Thus the philosopher absorbed by thought,
 Even Archimedes, busy o’er a book 760
 The while besiegers sacked his Syracuse,
 Was ignorant of the imminence o’ the point
 O’ the sword till it surprised him : let it stab,
 And never knew himself was dead at all.
 So sleep thou on, secure whate’er betide ! 765
 For thou, too, hast thy problem hard to solve—
 How so much beauty is compatible
 With so much innocence !

Fit place, methinks,

While in this task she rosily is lost, 770
 To treat of and repel objection here
 Which,—frivolous, I grant,—my mind misgives,

BK. IX JOHANNES-BAPTISTA BOTTINIUS

May somehow still have flitted, gadfly-like,
 And teased the Court at times—as if, all said
 And done, there seemed, the Court might nearly say, 775
 In a certain acceptation, somewhat more
 Of what may pass for insincerity,
 Falsehood, throughout the course Pompilia took,
 Than befits Christian. Pagans held, we know,
 Man always ought to aim at good and truth, 780
 Not always put one thing in the same words :
Non idem semper ducere sed spectare
Debemus. But the Pagan yoke was light ;
 “ Lie not at all,” the exacter precept bids :
 Each least lie breaks the law, is sin, we hold. 785
 I humble me, but venture to submit—
 What prevents sin, itself is sinless, sure :
 And sin, which hinders sin of deeper dye,
 Softens itself away by contrast so.
 Conceive me ! Little sin, by none at all, 790
 Were properly condemned for great : but great,
 By greater, dwindles into small again.
 Now, what is greatest sin of womanhood ?
 That which unwomans it, abolishes
 The nature of the woman,—impudence. 795
 Who contradicts me here ? Concede me, then,
 Whatever friendly fault may interpose
 To save the sex from self-abolishment
 Is three-parts on the way to virtue’s rank !
 And, what is taxed here as duplicity, 800
 Feint, wile and trick,—admitted for the nonce,—
 What worse do one and all than interpose,
 Hold, as it were, a deprecating hand,
 Statuesquely, in the Medicean mode,
 Before some shame which modesty would veil ? 805
 Who blames the gesture prettily perverse ?
 Thus,—lest ye miss a point illustrative,—
 Admit the husband’s calumny—allow

THE RING AND THE BOOK BK. IX

That the wife, having penned the epistle fraught
 With horrors, charge on charge of crimes she heaped 810
 O' the head of Pietro and Violante—(still
 Presumed her parents)—having despatched the
 same

To their arch-enemy Paolo, through free choice
 And no sort of compulsion in the world—
 Put case she next discards simplicity 815
 For craft, denies the voluntary act,
 Declares herself a passive instrument
 I' the husband's hands ; that, duped by knavery,
 She traced the characters she could not write,
 And took on trust the unread sense which, read, 820
 And recognized were to be spurned at once :
 Allow this calumny, I reiterate !
 Who is so dull as wonder at the pose
 Of our Pompilia in the circumstance ?
 Who sees not that the too-ingenuous soul, 825
 Repugnant even at a duty done
 Which brought beneath too scrutinizing glare
 The misdemeanours,—buried in the dark,—
 Of the authors of her being, as believed,—
 Stung to the quick at her impulsive deed, 830
 And willing to repair what harm it worked,
 She—wise in this beyond what Nero proved,
 Who when folk urged the candid juvenile
 To sign the warrant, doom the guilty dead,
 “Would I had never learned to write,” quoth he ! 835
 —Pompilia rose above the Roman, cried
 “To read or write I never learned at all !”
 O splendidly mendacious !

But time fleets :

Let us not linger : hurry to the end, 840
 Since flight does end, and that disastrously.
 Beware ye blame desert for unsuccess,

BK. IX JOHANNES-BAPTISTA BOTTINIUS

Disparage each expedient else to praise,
 Call failure folly ! Man's best effort fails.
 After ten years' resistance Troy succumbed : 845
 Could valour save a town, Troy still had stood.
 Pompilia came off halting in no point
 Of courage, conduct, her long journey through :
 But nature sank exhausted at the close,
 And, as I said, she swooned and slept all night. 850
 Morn breaks and brings the husband : we assist
 At the spectacle. Discovery succeeds.
 Ha, how is this ? What moonstruck rage is here ?
 Though we confess to partial frailty now,
 To error in a woman and a wife, 855
 Is 't by the rough way she shall be reclaimed ?
 Who bursts upon her chambered privacy ?
 What crowd profanes the chaste *cubiculum* ?
 What outcries and lewd laughter, scurril gibe
 And ribald jest to scare the ministrant 860
 Good angels that commerce with souls in sleep ?
 Why, had the worst crowned Guido to his wish,
 Confirmed his most irrational surmise,
 Yet there be bounds to man's emotion, checks
 To an immoderate astonishment. 865
 'T is decent horror, regulated wrath,
 Befit our dispensation : have we back
 The old Pagan license ? Shall a Vulcar clap
 His net o' the sudden and expose the pair
 To the unquenchable universal mirth ? 870
 A feat, antiquity saw scandal in
 So clearly, that the nauseous tale thereof—
 Demodocus his nugatory song—
 Hath ever been concluded modern stuff
 Impossible to the mouth of the grave Muse, 875
 So, foisted into that Eighth Odyssey
 By some impertinent pickthank. O thou fool,
 Count Guido Franceschini, what didst gain

THE RING AND THE BOOK BK. IX

By publishing thy secret to the world ?
 Were all the precepts of the wise a waste— 880
 Bred in thee not one touch of reverence ?
 Admit thy wife—admonish we the fool,—
 Were falseness' self, why chronicle thy shame ?
 Much rather should thy teeth bite out thy tongue,
 Dumb lip consort with desecrated brow, 885
 Silence become historiographer,
 And thou—thine own Cornelius Tacitus !
 But virtue, barred, still leaps the barrier, lords !
 —Still, moon-like, penetrates the encroaching mist
 And bursts, all broad and bare, on night, ye know ! 890
 Surprised, then, in the garb of truth, perhaps,
 Pompilia, thus opposed, breaks obstacle,
 Springs to her feet, and stands Thalassian-pure,
 Confronts the foe,—nay, catches at his sword
 And tries to kill the intruder, he complains. 895
 Why, so she gave her lord his lesson back,
 Crowned him, this time, the virtuous woman's way,
 With an exact obedience ; he brought sword,
 She drew the same, since swords are meant to draw.
 Tell not me 't is sharp play with tools on-edge ! 900
 It was the husband chose the weapon here.
 Why did not he inaugurate the game
 With some gentility of apophthegm
 Still pregnant on the philosophic page,
 Some captivating cadence still a-lisp 905
 O' the poet's lyre ? Such spells subdue the surge,
 Make tame the tempest, much more mitigate
 The passions of the mind, and probably
 Had moved Pompilia to a smiling blush.
 No, he must needs prefer the argument 910
 O' the blow : and she obeyed, in duty bound,
 Returned him buffet ratiocinative—
 Ay, in the reasoner's own interest,
 For wife must follow whither husband leads,

BK. IX JOHANNES-BAPTISTA BOTTINIUS

Vindicate honour as himself prescribes, 915
Save him the very way himself bids save !
No question but who jumps into a quag
Should stretch forth hand and pray us "Pull me out
"By the hand !" such were the customary cry :
But Guido pleased to bid "Leave hand alone ! 920
"Join both feet, rather, jump upon my head :
"I extricate myself by the rebound !"
And dutifully as enjoined she jumped—
Drew his own sword and menaced his own life,
Anything to content a wilful spouse. 925

And so he was contented—one must do
Justice to the expedient which succeeds,
Strange as it seem : at flourish of the blade,
The crowd drew back, stood breathless and abashed,
Then murmured "This should be no wanton wife, 930
"No conscience-stricken sinner, caught i' the act,
"And patiently awaiting our first stone :
"But a poor hard-pressed all-bewildered thing,
"Has rushed so far, misguidedly perhaps,
"Meaning no more harm than a frightened sheep. 935
"She sought for aid ; and if she made mistake
"I' the man could aid most, why—so mortals do :
"Even the blessed Magdalen mistook
"Far less forgiveably : consult the place—
"Supposing him to be the gardener, 940
" "Sir," said she, and so following." Why more
words ?

Forthwith the wife is pronounced innocent :
What would the husband more than gain his cause,
And find that honour flash in the world's eye,
His apprehension was lest soil had smirched ? 945

So, happily the adventure comes to close
Whereon my fat opponent grounds his charge

THE RING AND THE BOOK BK. IX

Preposterous: at mid-day he groans "How dark!"

Listen to me, thou Archangelic swine!

Where is the ambiguity to blame, 950

The flaw to find in our Pompilia? Safe

She stands, see! Does thy comment follow quick

"Safe, inasmuch as at the end proposed;

"But thither she picked way by devious path—

"Stands dirtied, no dubiety at all! 955

"I recognize success, yet, all the same,

"Importunately will suggestion prompt—

"Better Pompilia gained the right to boast

"No devious path, no doubtful patch was mine,

"I saved my head nor sacrificed my foot!" 960

"Why, being in a peril, show mistrust

"Of the angels set to guard the innocent?

"Why, rather hold by obvious vulgar help

"Of stratagem and subterfuge, excused

"Somewhat, but still no less a foil, a fault, 965

"Since low with high, and good with bad is
linked?

"Methinks I view some ancient bas-relief.

"There stands Hesione thrust out by Troy,

"Her father's hand has chained her to a crag,

"Her mother's from the virgin plucked the vest, 970

"At a safe distance both distressful watch,

"While near and nearer comes the snorting orc.

"I look that, white and perfect to the end,

"She wait till Jove despatch some demigod;

"Not that,—impatient of celestial club 975

"Alcmena's son should brandish at the beast,—

"She daub, disguise her dainty limbs with pitch,

"And so elude the purblind monster! Ay,

"The trick succeeds, but 't is an ugly trick,

"Where needs have been no trick!" 980

BK. IX JOHANNES-BAPTISTA BOTTINIUS

My answer? Faugh;
Nimis incongrue! Too absurdly put!
Sententiam ego teneo contrariam,
 Trick, I maintain, had no alternative.
 The heavens were bound with brass,—Jove far at
 feast 985
 (No feast like that thou didst not ask me to,
 Arcangeli,—I heard of thy regale!)
 With the unblamed Æthiop,—Hercules spun wool
 I' the lap of Omphale, while Virtue shrieked—
 The brute came paddling all the faster. You 990
 Of Troy, who stood at distance, where 's the aid
 You offered in the extremity? Most and least,
 Gentle and simple, here the Governor,
 There the Archbishop, everywhere the friends,
 Shook heads and waited for a miracle, 995
 Or went their way, left Virtue to her fate.
 Just this one rough and ready man leapt forth!
 —Was found, sole anti-Fabius (dare I say)
 Who restored things, with no delay at all,
Qui haud cunctando rem restituit! He, 1000
 He only, Caponsacchi 'mid a crowd,
 Caught Virtue up, carried Pompilia off
 Through gaping impotence of sympathy
 In ranged Arezzo: what you take for pity,
 Is nothing worse, belike, than black and blue, 1005
 Mere evanescent proof that hardy hands
 Did yeoman's service, cared not where the gripe
 Was more than duly energetic: bruised,
 She smarts a little, but her bones are saved
 A fracture, and her skin will soon show sleek. 1010
 How it disgusts when weakness, false-refined,
 Censures the honest rude effective strength,—
 When sickly dreamers of the impossible
 Decry plain sturdiness which does the feat
 With eyes wide open! 1015

THE RING AND THE BOOK BK. IX

Did occasion serve,

I could illustrate, if my lords allow ;
Quid retat, what forbids I aptly ask
 With Horace, that I give my anger vent,
 While I let breathe, no less, and recreate,
 The gravity of my Judges, by a tale ? 1020
 A case in point—what though an apologue
 Graced by tradition ?—possibly a fact:
 Tradition must precede all scripture, words
 Serve as our warrant ere our books can be : 1025
 So, to tradition back we needs must go
 For any fact's authority : and this
 Hath lived so far (like jewel hid in muck)
 On page of that old lying vanity
 Called "Sepher Toldoth Yeschu" : God be
 praised, 1030
 I read no Hebrew,—take the thing on trust :
 But I believe the writer meant no good
 (Blind as he was to truth in some respects)
 To our pestiferous and schismatic . . . well,
 My lords' conjecture be the touchstone, show 1035
 The thing for what it is ! The author lacks
 Discretion, and his zeal exceeds : but zeal,—
 How rare in our degenerate day ! Enough !
 Here is the story : fear not, I shall chop
 And change a little, else my Jew would press 1040
 All too unmannerly before the Court.

It happened once,—begins this foolish Jew,
 Pretending to write Christian history,—
 That three, held greatest, best and worst of men,
 Peter and John and Judas, spent a day 1045
 In toil and travel through the country-side
 On some sufficient business—I suspect,
 Suppression of some Molinism i' the bud.
 Foot-sore and hungry, dropping with fatigue,

BK. IX JOHANNES-BAPTISTA BOTTINIUS

They reached by nightfall a poor lonely grange, 1050
Hostel or inn : so, knocked and entered there.

"Your pleasure, great ones?"—"Shelter, rest
and food!"

For shelter, there was one bare room above ;
For rest therein, three beds of bundled straw :
For food, one wretched starveling fowl, no more— 1055
Meat for one mouth, but mockery for three.

"You have my utmost." How should supper
serve ?

Peter broke silence : "To the spit with fowl !

"And while 't is cooking, sleep!—since beds
there be,

"And, so far, satisfaction of a want. 1060

"Sleep we an hour, awake at supper-time,

"Then each of us narrate the dream he had,

"And he whose dream shall prove the happiest,
point

"The clearliest out the dreamer as ordained

"Beyond his fellows to receive the fowl, 1065

"Him let our shares be cheerful tribute to,

"His the entire meal, may it do him good !"

Who could dispute so plain a consequence ?

So said, so done : each hurried to his straw,

Slept his hour's-sleep and dreamed his dream, and
woke. 1070

"I," commenced John, "dreamed that I gained
the prize

"We all aspire to : the proud place was mine,

"Throughout the earth and to the end of time

"I was the Loved Disciple : mine the meal !"

"But I," proceeded Peter, "dreamed, a word 1075

"Gave me the headship of our company,

"Made me the Vicar and Vice-gerent, gave

"The keys of heaven and hell into my hand,

"And o'er the earth, dominion : mine the meal!"

THE RING AND THE BOOK BK. IX

"While I," submitted in soft under-tone 1080
 The Iscariot—sense of his unworthiness
 Turning each eye up to the inmost white—
 With long-drawn sigh, yet letting both lips smack,
 "I have had just the pitifullest dream
 "That ever proved man meanest of his mates, 1085
 "And born foot-washer and foot-wiper, nay
 "Foot-kisser to each comrade of you all!
 "I dreamed I dreamed; and in that mimic dream
 "(Impalpable to dream as dream to fact)
 "Methought I meanly chose to sleep no wink 1090
 "But wait until I heard my brethren snore;
 "Then stole from couch, slipped noiseless o'er
 the planks,
 "Slid downstairs, furtively approached the hearth,
 "Found the fowl duly brown, both back and
 breast,
 "Hissing in harmony with the cricket's chirp, 1095
 "Grilled to a point; said no grace but fell to,
 "Nor finished till the skeleton lay bare.
 "In penitence for which ignoble dream,
 "Lo, I renounce my portion cheerfully!
 "Fie on the flesh—be mine the ethereal gust, 1100
 "And yours the sublunary sustenance!
 "See that whate'er be left ye give the poor!"
 Down the two scuttled, one on other's heel,
 Stung by a fell surmise; and found, alack,
 A goodly savour, both the drumstick bones, 1105
 And that which henceforth took the appropriate
 name
 O' the Merry-thought, in memory of the fact
 That to keep wide awake is man's best dream.

So,—as was said once of Thucydides
 And his sole joke, "The lion, lo, hath laughed!"— 1110
 Just so, the Governor and all that's great

bk. ix JOHANNES-BAPTISTA BOTTINIUS

I' the city, never meant that Innocence
 Should quite starve while Authority sat at meat ;
 They meant to fling a bone at banquet's end :
 Wished well to our Pompilia—in their dreams, 1115
 Nor bore the secular sword in vain—asleep.
 Just so the Archbishop and all good like him
 Went to bed meaning to pour oil and wine
 I' the wounds of her, next day,—but long ere day,
 They had burned the one and drunk the other,
 while 1120

Just so, again, contrariwise, the priest
 Sustained poor Nature in extremity
 By stuffing barley-bread into her mouth,
 Saving Pompilia (grant the parallel)
 By the plain homely and straightforward way 1125
 Taught him by common sense. Let others shriek
 “ Oh what refined expedients did we dream
 “ Proved us the only fit to help the fair ! ”
 He cried “ A carriage waits, jump in with me ! ”

And now, this application pardoned, lords,— 1130
 This recreative pause and breathing-while,—
 Back to beseeemingness and gravity !
 For Law steps in : Guido appeals to Law,
 Demands she arbitrate,—does well for once.
 O Law, of thee how neatly was it said 1135
 By that old Sophocles, thou hast thy seat
 I' the very breast of Jove, no meanlier throned !
 Here is a piece of work now, hitherto
 Begun and carried on, concluded near,
 Without an eye-glance cast thy sceptre's way ; 1140
 And, lo the stumbling and discomfiture !
 Well may you call them “ lawless ” means, men take
 To extricate themselves through mother-wit
 When tangled haply in the toils of life !
 Guido would try conclusions with his foe, 1145

THE RING AND THE BOOK BK. IX

Whoe'er the foe was and whate'er the offence ;
 He would recover certain dowry-dues :
 Instead of asking Law to lend a hand,
 What pother of sword drawn and pistol cocked,
 What peddling with forged letters and paid spies, 1150
 Politic circumvention !—all to end
 As it began—by loss of the fool's head,
 First in a figure, presently in a fact.
 It is a lesson to mankind at large.
 How other were the end, would men be sage 1155
 And bear confidingly each quarrel straight,
 O Law, to thy recipient mother-knees !
 How would the children light come and prompt go,
 This with a red-cheeked apple for reward,
 The other, peradventure red-cheeked too 1160
 I' the rear, by taste of birch for punishment.
 No foolish brawling murder any more !
 Peace for the household, practise for the Fisc,
 And plenty for the exchequer of my lords !
 Too much to hope, in this world : in the next, 1165
 Who knows ? Since, why should sit the Twelve
 enthroned
 To judge the tribes, unless the tribes be judged ?
 And 't is impossible but offences come :
 So, all 's one lawsuit, all one long leet-day !

Forgive me this digression—that I stand 1170
 Entranced awhile at Law's first beam, outbreak
 O' the business, when the Count's good angel bade
 " Put up thy sword, born enemy to the ear,
 " And let Law listen to thy difference ! "
 And Law does listen and compose the strife, 1175
 Settle the suit, how wisely and how well !
 On our Pompilia, faultless to a fault,
 Law bends a brow maternally severe,
 Implies the worth of perfect chastity,

BK. IX JOHANNES-BAPTISTA BOTTINIUS

By fancying the flaw she cannot find. 1180
 Superfluous sifting snow, nor helps nor harms ;
 'T is safe to censure levity in youth,
 Tax womanhood with indiscretion, sure !
 Since toys, permissible to-day, become
 Follies to-morrow : prattle shocks in church : 1185
 And that curt skirt which lets a maiden skip,
 The matron changes for a trailing robe.
 Mothers may aim a blow with half-shut eyes
 Nodding above their spindles by the fire,
 And chance to hit some hidden fault, else safe. 1190
 Just so, Law hazarded a punishment—
 If applicable to the circumstance,
 Why, well ! if not so apposite, well too.
 "Quit the gay range o' the world," I hear her cry,
 "Enter, in lieu, the penitential pound : 1195
 "Exchange the gauds of pomp for ashes, dust !
 "Leave each mollitious haunt of luxury !
 "The golden-garnished silken-couched alcove,
 "The many-columned terrace that so tempts
 "Feminine soul put foot forth, extend ear 1200
 "To fluttering joy of lover's serenade,—
 "Leave these for cellular seclusion ! mask
 "And dance no more, but fast and pray ! avaunt—
 "Be burned, thy wicked townsman's sonnet book !
 "Welcome, mild hymnal by . . . some better
 scribe ! 1205
 "For the warm arms were wont enfold thy flesh,
 "Let wire-shirt plough and whipcord discipline !"
 If such an exhortation proved, perchance,
 Inapplicable, words bestowed in waste,
 What harm, since Law has store, can spend nor
 miss ? 1210

And so, our paragon submits herself,
 Goes at command into the hol' house,

THE RING AND THE BOOK BK. IX

And, also at command, comes out again :
 For, could the effect of such obedience prove
 Too certain, too immediate? Being healed, 1215
 Go blaze abroad the matter, blessed one !
 Art thou sound forthwith? Speedily vacate
 The step by pool-side, leave Bethesda free
 To patients plentifully posted round,
 Since the whole need not the physician ! Brief, 1220
 She may betake her to her parents' place.
 Welcome her, father, with wide arms once more,
 Motion her, mother, to thy breast again !
 For why? Since Law relinquishes the charge,
 Grants to your dwelling-place a prison's style, 1225
 Rejoice you with Pompilia ! golden days,
Redeunt Saturnia regna. Six weeks slip,
 And she is domiciled in house and home
 As though she thence had never budged at all.
 And thither let the husband,—joyous, ay, 1230
 But contrite also—quick betake himself,
 Proud that his dove which lay among the pots
 Hath mued those dingy feathers,—moulted now,
 Shows silver bosom clothed with yellow gold !
 So shall he tempt her to the perch she fled, 1235
 Bid to domestic bliss the truant back.

But let him not delay ! Time fleets how fast,
 And opportunity, the irrevocable,
 Once flown will flout him ! Is the furrow traced ?
 If field with corn ye fail preoccupy, 1240
 Darnel for wheat and thistle-beards for grain,
Infelix lolium, carduus horridus,
 Will grow apace in combination prompt,
 Defraud the husbandman of his desire.
 Already—hist—what murmurs 'monish now 1245
 The laggard?—doubtful, nay, fantastic bruit
 Of such an apparition, such return

BK. IX JOHANNES-BAPTISTA BOTTINIUS

Interdum, to anticipate the spouse,
 Of Caponsacchi's very self ! 'T is said,
 When nights are lone and company is rare, 1250
 His visitations brighten winter up.
 If so they did—which nowise I believe—
 (How can I ?—proof abounding that the priest,
 Once fairly at his relegation-place,
 Never once left it) still, admit he stole 1255
 A midnight march, would fain see friend again,
 Find matter for instruction in the past,
 Renew the old adventure in such chat
 As cheers a fireside ! He was lonely too,
 He, too, must need his recreative hour. 1260
 Shall it amaze the philosophic mind
 If he, long wont the empurpled cup to quaff,
 Have feminine society at will,
 Being debarred abruptly from all drink
 Save at the spring which Adam used for wine, 1265
 Dreads harm to just the health he hoped to guard,
 And, trying abstinence, gains malady ?
 Ask Tozzi, now physician to the Pope !
 " Little by little break "—(I hear he bids
 Master Arcangeli my antagonist, 1270
 Who loves good cheer, and may indulge too much :
 So I explain the logic of the plea
 Wherewith he opened our proceedings late) -
 " Little by little break a habit, Don,
 " Become necessity to feeble flesh ! " 1275
 And thus, nocturnal taste of intercourse
 (Which never happened,—but, suppose it did)
 May have been used to dishabituate
 By sip and sip this drainer to the dregs
 O' the draught of conversation,—heady stuff, 1280
 Brewage which, broached, it took two days and
 nights
 To properly discuss i' the journ., Sirs !

THE RING AND THE BOOK BK. IX

Such power has second-nature, men call use,
 That undelightful objects get to charm
 Instead of chafe : the daily colocynth 1285
 Tickles the palate by repeated dose,
 Old sores scratch kindly, the ass makes a push,
 Although the mill-yoke-wound be smarting yet,
 For mill-door bolted on a holiday :
 Nor must we marvel here if impulse urge 1290
 To talk the old story over now and then,
 The hopes and fears, the stoppage and the haste,—
 Subjects of colloquy to surfeit once.
 “ Here did you bid me twine a rosy wreath ! ”
 “ And there you paid my lips a compliment ! ” 1295
 “ Here you admired the tower could be so tall ! ”
 “ And there you likened that of Lebanon
 “ To the nose of the beloved ! ” Trifles ! still,
 “ *Forsan et hæc olim*,”—such trifles serve
 To make the minutes pass in winter-time. 1300

Husband, return then, I re-counsel thee !
 For, finally, of all glad circumstance
 Should make a prompt return imperative,
 What in the world awaits thee, dost suppose ?
 O’ the sudden, as good gifts are wont befall, 1305
 What is the hap of our unconscious Count ?
 That which lights bonfire and sets cask a-tilt,
 Dissolves the stubborn’s heart in jollity.
 O admirable, there is born a babe,
 A son, an heir, a Franceschini last 1310
 And best o’ the stock ! Pompilia, thine the palm !
 Repaying incredulity with faith,
 Ungenerous thrift of each marital debt
 With bounty in profuse expenditure,
 Pompilia scorns to have the old year end 1315
 Without a present shall ring in the new—
 Bestows on her too-parsimonious lord

BK. IX JOHANNES-BAPTISTA BOTTINIUS

An infant for the apple of his eye,
 Core of his heart, and crown completing life,
 True *summum bonum* of the earthly lot ! 1320
 "We," saith ingeniously the sage, "are born
 "Solely that others may be born of us."
 So, father, take thy child, for thine that child.
 Oh nothing doubt ! In wedlock born, law holds
 Baseness impossible : since "*filius est*" 1325
 "*Quem nuptiæ demonstrant*," twits the text
 Whoever dares to doubt.

Yet doubt he dares !

O faith, where art thou flown from out the world ?
 Already on what an age of doubt we fall ! 1330
 Instead of each disputing for the prize,
 The babe is bandied here from that to this.
 Whose the babe ? "*Cujum pæus ?*" Guido's lamb ?
 "*An Melibæi ?*" Nay, but of the priest !
 "*Non sed Egonis !*" Someone must be sire : 1335
 And who shall say, in such a puzzling strait,
 If there were not vouchsafed some miracle
 To the wife who had been harassed and abused
 More than enough by Guido's family
 For non-production of the promised fruit 1340
 Of marriage ? What if Nature, I demand,
 Touched to the quick by taunts upon her sloth,
 Had roused herself, put forth recondite power,
 Bestowed this birth to vindicate her sway,
 Like the strange favour, Maro memorized 1345
 As granted Aristæus when his hive
 Lay empty of the swarm ? not one more bee—
 Not one more babe to Franceschini's house !
 And lo, a new birth filled the air with joy,
 Sprung from the bowels of the generous steer, 1350
 A novel son and heir rejoiced the Count !
 Spontaneous generation, need I prove
 Were facile feat to Nature at a pinch ?

THE RING AND THE BOOK BK. IX

Let whoso doubts, steep horsehair certain weeks
 In water, there will be produced a snake ; 1355
 Spontaneous product of the horse, which horse
 Happens to be the representative—
 Now that I think on 't—of Arezzo's self,
 The very city our conception blessed :
 Is not a prancing horse the City-arms ? 1360
 What sane eye fails to see coincidence ?
Cui ego, boast thou, my Pompilia, then,
Desperem fieri sine conjuge
Mater—how well the Ovidian distich suits !—
Et parere intacto dummodo 1365
Casta viro ? Such miracle was wrought !
 Note, further, as to mark the prodigy,
 The babe in question neither took the name
 Of Guido, from the sire presumptive, nor
 Giuseppe, from the sire potential, but 1370
 Gaetano—last saint of our hierarchy,
 And newest namer for a thing so new !
 What other motive could have prompted choice ?

Therefore be peace again : exult, ye hills !
 Ye vales rejoicingly break forth in song ! 1375
Incipe, parve puer, begin, small boy,
Risu cognoscere patrem, with a laugh
 To recognize thy parent ! Nor do thou
 Boggle, oh parent, to return the grace !
Nec anceps hære, pater, puero 1380
Cognoscendo—one may well eke out the prayer !
 In vain ! The perverse Guido doubts his eyes,
 Distrusts assurance, lets the devil drive.
 Because his house is swept and garnished now,
 He, having summoned seven like himself, 1385
 Must hurry thither, knock and enter in,
 And make the last worse than the first, indeed !
 Is he content ? We are. No further blame

BK. IX JOHANNES-BAPTISTA BOTTINIUS

O' the man and murder ! 'They were stigmatized
 Befittingly : the Court heard long ago 1390
 My mind o' the matter, which, outpouring full,
 Has long since swept like surge, i' the simile
 Of Homer, overborne both dyke and dam,
 And whelmed alike client and advocate :
 His fate is sealed, his life as good as gone, 1395
 On him I am not tempted to waste word.
 Yet though my purpose holds,—which was and is
 And solely shall be to the very end,
 To draw the true *effigies* of a saint,
 Do justice to perfection in the sex,— 1400
 Yet let not some gross pamperer of the flesh
 And niggard in the spirit's nourishment,
 Whose feeding hath offuscated his wit
 Rather than law,—he never had, to lose—
 Let not such advocate object to me 1405
 I leave my proper function of attack !
 "What 's this to Bacchus?"—(in the classic
 phrase,
 Well used, for once) he hiccups probably.
 O Advocate o' the Poor, thou born to make
 Their blessing void—*beati pauperes* ! 1410
 By painting saintship I depicture sin :
 Beside my pearl, I prove how black thy jet
 And, through Pompilia's virtue, Guido's crime.

Back to her, then,—with but one beauty more,
 End we our argument,—one crowning grace 1415
 Pre-eminent 'mid agony and death.
 For to the last Pompilia played her part,
 Used the right means to the permissible end,
 And, wily as an eel that stirs the mud
 Thick overhead, so baffling spearman's thrust, 1420
 She, while he stabbed her, simulated death,
 Delayed, for his sake, the catastrophe,

THE RING AND THE BOOK BK. IX

Obtained herself a respite, four days' grace,
Whereby she told her story to the world,
Enabled me to make the present speech, 1425
And, by a full confession, saved her soul.

Yet hold, even here would malice leer its last,
Gurgle its choked remonstrance : snake, hiss free !
Oh, that 's the objection ? And to whom ?—not her
But me, forsooth—as, in the very act 1430
Of both confession and (what followed close)
Subsequent talk, chatter and gossipry,
Babble to sympathizing he and she
Whoever chose besiege her dying bed,—
As this were found at variance with my tale, 1435
Falsified all I have adduced for truth,
Admitted not one peccadillo here,
Pretended to perfection, first and last,
O' the whole procedure—perfect in the end,
Perfect i' the means, perfect in everything, 1440
Leaving a lawyer nothing to excuse,
Reason away and show his skill about !
—A flight, impossible to Adamic flesh,
Just to be fancied, scarcely to be wished,
And, anyhow, unpleadable in court ! 1445
“How reconcile,” gasps Malice, “that with this?”

Your “this,” friend, is extraneous to the law,
Comes of men's outside meddling, the unskilled
Interposition of such fools as press
Out of their province. Must I speak my mind ? 1450
Far better had Pompilia died o' the spot
Than found a tongue to wag and shame the law,
Shame most of all herself,—could friendship fail
And advocacy lie less on the alert :
But no, they shall protect her to the end ! 1455
Do I credit the alleged narration ? No !

BK. IX JOHANNES-BAPTISTA BOTTINIUS

Lied our Pompilia then, to laud herself?
 Still, no! Clear up what seems discrepancy?
 The means abound: art's long, though time is
 short;

So, keeping me in compass, all I urge 1460

Is—since, confession at the point of death,

Nam in articulo mortis, with the Church

Passes for statement honest and sincere,

Nemo presumitur reus esse,—then,

If sure that all affirmed would be believed, 1465

'T was charity, in her so circumstanced,

To spend the last breath in one effort more

For universal good of friend and foe:

And,—by pretending utter innocence,

Nay, freedom from each foible we forgive,— 1470

Re-integrate—not solely her own fame,

But do the like kind office for the priest

Whom telling the crude truth about might vex,

Haply expose to peril, abbreviate

Indeed the long career of usefulness 1475

Presumably before him: while her lord,

Whose fleeting life is forfeit to the law,—

What mercy to the culprit if, by just

The gift of such a full certificate

Of his immitigable guiltiness, 1480

She stifled in him the absurd conceit

Of murder as it were a mere revenge

—Stopped confirmation of that jealousy

Which, did she but acknowledge the first flaw,

The faintest foible, had emboldened him 1485

To battle with the charge, baulk penitence,

Bar preparation for impending fate!

Whereas, persuade him that he slew a saint

Who sinned not even where she may have sinned,

You urge him all the brisklier to repent 1490

Of most and least and aught and everything!

THE RING AND THE BOOK BK. IX

Still, if this view of mine content you not,
 Lords, nor excuse the genial falsehood here,
 We come to our *Triarii*, last resource :
 We fall back on the inexpugnable, 1495
 Submitting,—she confessed before she talked !
 The sacrament obliterates the sin :
 What is not,—was not, therefore, in a sense.
 Let Molinists distinguish, “Souls washed white
 “But red once, still show pinkish to the eye !” 1500
 We say, abolishment is nothingness,
 And nothingness has neither head nor tail,
 End nor beginning ! Better estimate
 Exorbitantly, than disparage aught
 Of the efficacy of the act, I hope ! 1505

Sokuntur tabulae ? May we laugh and go ?
 Well,—not before (in filial gratitude
 To Law, who, mighty mother, waves adieu)
 We take on us to vindicate Law's self !
 For,—yea, Sirs,—curb the start, curtail the stare!— 1510
 Remains that we apologize for haste
 I' the Law, our lady who here bristles up
 “Blame my procedure? Could the Court mistake?
 “(Which were indeed a misery to think)
 “Did not my sentence in the former stage 1515
 “O' the business bear a title plain enough?
 “*Decretum*”—I translate it word for word—
 “‘Decreed : the priest, for his complicity
 “‘I' the flight and deviation of the dame,
 “‘As well as for unlawful intercourse, 1520
 “‘Is banished three years': crime and penalty,
 “Declared alike. If he be taxed with guilt,
 “How can you call Pompilia innocent?
 “If both be innocent, have I been just?”

Gently, O mother, judge men—whose mistake 1525

BK. IX JOHANNES-BAPTISTA BOTTINIUS

Is in the mere misapprehensiveness !
 The *Titulus* a-top of your decree
 Was but to ticket there the kind of charge
 You in good time would arbitrate upon.
 Title is one thing,—arbitration's self, 1530
Probatio, quite another possibly.
Subsistit, there holds good the old response,
Responsio tradita, we must not stick,
Quod non sit attendendus Titulus,
 To the Title, *sed Probatio*, but the Proof, 1535
Resultans ex processu, the result
 O' the Trial, and the style of punishment,
Et pœna per sententiam imposita.
 All is tentative, till the sentence come :
 An indication of what men expect, 1540
 But nowise an assurance they shall find.
 Lords, what if we permissibly relax
 The tense bow, as the law-god Phœbus bids,
 Relieve our gravity at labour's close ?
 I traverse Rome, feel thirsty, need a draught, 1545
 Look for a wine-shop, find it by the bough
 Projecting as to say " Here wine is sold !"
 So much I know,—"sold" : but what sort of wine?
 Strong, weak, sweet, sour, home-made or foreign
 drink ?
 That much must I discover by myself. 1550
 " Wine is sold," quoth the bough, " but good or
 bad,
 " Find, and inform us when you smack your lips !"
 Exactly so, Law hangs her title forth,
 To show she entertains you with such case
 About such crime. Come in ! she pours, you quaff. 1555
 You find the Priest good liquor in the main,
 But heady and provocative of brawls :
 Remand the residue to flask once more,
 Lay it low where it may deposit 'ees,

THE RING AND THE BOOK BK. IX

I' the cellar: thence produce it presently, '560
Three years the brighter and the better !

Thus,
Law's son, have I bestowed my filial help,
And thus I end, *tenax proposito* ;
Point to point as I purposed have I drawn 1565
Pompilia, and implied as terribly
Guido : so, gazing, let the world crown Law—
Able once more, despite my impotence,
And helped by the acumen of the Court,
To eliminate, display, make triumph truth ! 1570
What other prize than truth were worth the pains ?

There 's my oration—much exceeds in length
That famed panegyric of Isocrates,
They say it took him fifteen years to pen.
But all those ancients could say anything ! 1575
He put in just what rushed into his head :
While I shall have to prune and pare and print.
This comes of being born in modern times
With priests for auditory. Still, it pays.

X.—THE POPE

LIKE to Ahasuerus, that shrewd prince,
I will begin,—as is, these seven years now,
My daily wont,—and read a History
(Written by one whose deft right hand was dust
To the last digit, ages ere my birth) 5
Of all my predecessors, Popes of Rome :
For though mine ancient early dropped the pen,
Yet others picked it up and wrote it dry,
Since of the making books there is no end.
And so I have the Papacy complete 10
From Peter first to Alexander last ;
Can question each and take instruction so.
Have I to dare ?—I ask, how dared this Pope ?
To suffer ?—Suchanone, how suffered he ?
Being about to judge, as now, I seek 15
How judged once, well or ill, some other Pope ;
Study some signal judgment that subsists
To blaze on, or else blot, the page which seals
The sum up of what gain or loss to God
Came of His one more Vicar in the world. 20
So, do I find example, rule of life ;
So, square and set in order the next page,
Shall be stretched smooth o'er my own funeral cyst.

Eight hundred years exact before the year
I was made Pope, men made Formosus Pope, 25
Say Sigebert and other chroniclers.
Ere I confirm or quash the Trial here
Of Guido Franceschini and his friends,

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK X

Read,—How there was a ghastly Trial once
Of a dead man by a live man, and both, Popes : 30
Thus—in the antique penman's very phrase.

“Then Stephen, Pope and seventh of the name,
“Cried out, in synod as he sat in state,
“While choler quivered on his brow and beard,
“‘Come into court, Formosus, thou lost wretch, 35
“‘That claimedst to be late Pope as even I!’

“And at the word the great door of the church
“Flew wide, and in they brought Formosus' self,
“The body of him, dead, even as embalmed
“And buried duly in the Vatican 40
“Eight months before, exhumed thus for the
 nonce.

“They set it, that dead body of a Pope,
“Clothed in pontific vesture now again,
“Upright on Peter's chair as if alive.

“And Stephen, springing up, cried furiously 45
“‘Bishop of Porto, wherefore didst presume
“‘To leave that see and take this Roman see
“‘Exchange the lesser for the greater see,
“‘—A thing against the canons of the Church?’

“Then one—(a Deacon who, observing forms, 50
“Was placed by Stephen to repel the charge,
“Be advocate and mouthpiece of the corpse)—
“Spoke as he dared, set stammeringly forth
“With white lips and dry tongue,—as but a youth
“For frightful was the corpse-face to behold, — 55
“How nowise lacked there precedent for this.

“But when, for his last precedent of all,
“Emboldened by the Spirit, out he blurts

“ ‘And, Holy Father, didst not thou thyself
“ ‘Vacate the lesser for the greater see, 60
“ ‘Half a year since change Arago for Rome?
“ ‘—Ye have the sin’s defence now, Synod mine!’
“ ‘Shrieks Stephen in a beastly froth of rage :
“ ‘Judge now betwixt him dead and me alive !
“ ‘Hath he intruded, or do I pretend? 65
“ ‘Judge, judge!’ -breaks wavelike one whole
foam of wrath.

“ ‘Whereupon they, being friends and followers,
“ ‘Said ‘Ay, thou art Christ’s Vicar, and not he !
“ ‘Away with what is frightful to behold !
“ ‘This act was uncanonic and a fault.’ 70

“ ‘Then, swallowed up in rage, Stephen exclaimed
“ ‘So, guilty ! So, remains I punish guilt !
“ ‘He is unpoped, and all he did I damn :
“ ‘The Bishop, that ordained him, I degrade :
“ ‘Depose to laics those he raised to priests : 75
“ ‘What they have wrought is mischief nor shall
stand,
“ ‘It is confusion, let it vex no more !
“ ‘Since I revoke, annul and abrogate
“ ‘All his decrees in all kinds : they are void ’
“ ‘In token whereof and warning to the world, 80
“ ‘Strip me yon miscreant of those robes usurped,
“ ‘And clothe him with vile serge befitting such !
“ ‘Then hale the carrion to the market-place :
“ ‘Let the town-hangman chop from his right hand
“ ‘Those same three fingers which he blessed 85
withal ;
“ ‘Next cut the head off once was crowned for-
sooth :
“ ‘And last go fling them, fingers, head and trunk,
“ ‘To Tiber that my Christian fish may sup !’

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK X

“—Either because of *ΙΧΘΥΣ* which means Fish
 “And very aptly symbolizes Christ, 90
 “Or else because the Pope is Fisherman,
 “And seals with Fisher’s-signet.

“Anyway,

“So said, so done : himself, to see it done,
 “Followed the corpse they trailed from street to
 street 95
 “Till into Tiber wave they threw the thing.
 “The people, crowded on the banks to see,
 “Were loud or mute, wept or laughed, cursed or
 jeered,
 “According as the deed addressed their sense ;
 “A scandal verily : and out spake a Jew 100
 “‘Wot ye your Christ had vexed our Herod thus?’

“Now when, Formosus being dead a year,
 “His judge Pope Stephen tasted death in turn,
 “Made captive by the mob and strangled straight,
 “Romanus, his successor for a month, 105
 “Did make protest Formosus was with God,
 “Holy, just, true in thought and word and deed.
 “Next Theodore, who reigned but twenty days,
 “Therein convoked a synod, whose decree
 “Did reinstate, repope the late unpoped, 110
 “And do away with Stephen as accursed.
 “So that when presently certain fisher-folk
 “(As if the queasy river could not hold
 “Its swallowed Jonas, but discharged the meal)
 “Produced the timely product of their nets, 115
 “The mutilated man, Formosus,—saved
 “From putrefaction by the embalmer’s spice,
 “Or, as some said, by sanctity of flesh,—
 “‘Why, lay the body again,’ bade Theodore,
 “‘Among his predecessors, in the church 120

" ' And burial-place of Peter ! ' which was done.
 " ' And,' addeth Luitprand, ' many of repute,
 " ' Pious and still alive, avouch to me
 " ' That, as they bore the body up the aisle,
 " ' The saints in imaged row bowed each his head 125
 " ' For welcome to a brother-saint come back.'
 " As for Romanus and this Theodore,
 " These two Popes, through the brief reign
 granted each,
 " Could but initiate what John came to close
 " And give the final stamp to : he it was 130
 " Ninth of the name, (I follow the best guides)
 " Who,—in full synod at Ravenna held
 " With Bishops seventy-four, and present too
 " Eude King of France with his Archbishopry,—
 " Did condemn Stephen, anathematize 135
 " The disinterment, and make all blots blank,
 " ' For,' argueth here Auxilius in a place
 " *De Ordinationibus*, ' precedents
 " ' Had been, no lack, before Formosus long,
 " ' Of Bishops so transferred from see to see,— 140
 " ' Marinus, for example ' : read the tract.

" But, after John, came Sergius, reaffirmed
 " The right of Stephen, cursed Formosus, nay
 " Cast out, some say, his corpse a second time.
 " And here,—because the matter went to ground, 145
 " Fretted by new griefs, other cares of the age,—
 " Here is the last pronouncing of the Church,
 " Her sentence that subsists unto this day.
 " Yet constantly opinion hath prevailed
 " I' the Church, Formosus was a holy man.' 150

Which of the judgments was infallible ?
 Which of my predecessors spoke for God ?
 And what availed Formosus that this cursed,

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK X

That blessed, and then this other cursed again?
"Fear ye not those whose power can kill the body 155
"And not the soul," saith Christ, "but rather
those
"Can cast both soul and body into hell!"

John judged thus in Eight Hundred Ninety Eight,
Exact eight hundred years ago to-day
When, sitting in his stead, Vice-gerent here, 160
I must give judgment on my own behoof.
So worked the predecessor: now, my turn!

In God's name! Once more on this earth of
God's,
While twilight lasts and time wherein to work,
I take His staff with my uncertain hand, 165
And stay my six and fourscore years, my due
Labour and sorrow, on His judgment-seat,
And forthwith think, speak, act, in place of Him—
The Pope for Christ. Once more appeal is made
From man's assize to mine: I sit and see 170
Another poor weak trembling human wretch
Pushed by his fellows, who pretend the right,
Up to the gulf which, where I gaze, begins
From this world to the next,—gives way and way,
Just on the edge over the awful dark: 175
With nothing to arrest him but my feet.
He catches at me with convulsive face,
Cries "Leave to live the natural minute more!"
While hollowly the avengers echo "Leave?"
"None! So has he exceeded man's due share 180
"In man's fit license, wrung by Adam's fall,
"To sin and yet not surely die,—that we,
"All of us sinful, all with need of grace,
"All chary of our life,—the minute more
"Or minute less of grace which saves a soul,— 185

“ Bound to make common cause with who craves
time,

“ —We yet protest against the exorbitance

“ Of sin in this one sinner, and demand

“ That his poor sole remaining piece of time

“ Be plucked from out his clutch : put him to
death !

190

“ Punish him now ! As for the weal or woe

“ Hereafter, God grant mercy ! Man be just,

“ Nor let the felon boast he went scot-free ! ”

And I am bound, the solitary judge,

To weigh the worth, decide upon the plea,

195

And either hold a hand out, or withdraw

A foot and let the wretch drift to the fall.

Ay, and while thus I dally, dare perchance

Put fancies for a comfort 'twixt this calm

And yonder passion that I have to bear,—

200

As if reprieve were possible for both

Prisoner and Pope,—how easy were reprieve !

A touch o' the hand-bell here, a hasty word

To those who wait, and wonder they wait long,

I' the passage there, and I should gain the life !—

205

Yea, though I flatter me with fancy thus,

I know it is but nature's craven-trick.

The case is over, judgment at an end,

And all things done now and irrevocable :

A mere dead man is Franceschini here,

210

Even as Formosus centuries ago.

I have worn through this sombre wintry day,

With winter in my soul beyond the world's,

Over these dismalest of documents

Which drew night down on me ere eve befell,—

215

Pleadings and counter-pleadings, figure of fact

Beside fact's self, these summaries to-wit,—

How certain three were slain by certain five :

I read here why it was, and how it went,

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK X

And how the chief o' the five preferred excuse, 220
 And how law rather chose defence should lie,—
 What argument he urged by wary word
 When free to play off wile, start subterfuge,
 And what the unguarded groan told, torture's feat
 When law grew brutal, outbroke, overbore 225
 And glutted hunger on the truth, at last,—
 No matter for the flesh and blood between.
 All 's a clear rede and no more riddle now.
 Truth, nowhere, lies yet everywhere in these—
 Not absolutely in a portion, yet 230
 Evolvable from the whole : evolved at last
 Painfully, held tenaciously by me.
 Therefore there is not any doubt to clear
 When I shall write the brief word presently
 And chink the hand-bell, which I pause to do. 235
 Irresolute? Not I, more than the mound
 With the pine-trees on it yonder ! Some surmise,
 Perchance, that since man's wit is fallible,
 Mine may fail here ? Suppose it so,—what then ?
 Say,—Guido, I count guilty, there 's no babe 240
 So guiltless, for I misconceive the man !
 What 's in the chance should move me from my
 mind ?
 If, as I walk in a rough country-side,
 Peasants of mine cry "Thou art he can help,
 "Lord of the land and counted wise to boot : 245
 "Look at our brother, strangling in his foam,
 "He fell so where we find him,—prove thy worth !"
 I may presume, pronounce, "A frenzy-fit,
 "A falling-sickness or a fever-stroke !
 "Breathe a vein, copiously let blood at once !" 250
 So perishes the patient, and anon
 I hear my peasants—"All was error, lord !
 "Our story, thy prescription : for there crawled
 "In due time from our hapless brother's breast

"The serpent which had stung him: bleeding slew 255
"Whom a prompt cordial had restored to health."
What other should I say than "God so willed :
"Mankind is ignorant, a man am I :
"Call ignorance my sorrow, not my sin !"
So and not otherwise, in after-time, 260
If some acuter wit, fresh probing, sound
This multifarious mass of words and deeds
Deeper, and reach through guilt to innocence,
I shall face Guido's ghost nor blench a jot.
"God who set me to judge thee, meted out 265
"So much of judging faculty, no more :
"Ask Him if I was slack in use thereof !"
I hold a heavier fault imputable
Inasmuch as I changed a chaplain once,
For no cause,—no, if I must bare my heart,— 270
Save that he snuffled somewhat saying mass.
For I am ware it is the seed of act,
God holds appraising in His hollow palm,
Not act grown great thence on the world below,
Leafage and branchage, vulgar eyes admire. 275
Therefore I stand on my integrity,
Nor fear at all : and if I hesitate,
It is because I need to breathe awhile,
Rest, as the human right allows, review
Intent the little seeds of act, my tree,— 280
The thought, which, clothed in deed, I give the
world
At chink of bell and push of arrased door.

O pale departure, dim disgrace of day !
Winter 's in wane, his vengeful worst art thou,
To dash the boldness of advancing March ! 285
Thy chill persistent rain has purged our streets
Of gossipry ; pert tongue and idle ear
By this, consort 'neath archway, portico.

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK X

But wheresoe'er Rome gathers in the grey,
 Two names now snap and flash from mouth to
 mouth— 290
 (Sparks, flint and steel strike) Guido and the Pope.
 By this same hour to-morrow eve—aha,
 How do they call him?—the sagacious Swede
 Who finds by figures how the chances prove,
 Why one comes rather than another thing, 295
 As, say, such dots turn up by throw of dice,
 Or, if we dip in Virgil here and there
 And prick for such a verse, when such shall point.
 Take this Swede, tell him, hiding name and rank,
 Two men are in our city this dull eve ; 300
 Onedoomed to death,—but hundreds in such plight
 Slip aside, clean escape by leave of law
 Which leans to mercy in this latter time ;
 Moreover in the plenitude of life
 Is he, with strength of limb and brain adroit, 305
 Presumably of service here : beside,
 The man is noble, backed by nobler friends :
 Nay, they so wish him well, the city's self
 Makes common cause with who—house-magistrate,
 Patron of hearth and home, domestic lord— 310
 But ruled his 'own, let aliens cavil. Dic ?
 He 'll bribe a gaoler or break prison first !
 Nay, a sedition may be helpful, give
 Hint to the mob to batter wall, burn gate,
 And bid the favourite malefactor march. 315
 Calculate now these chances of escape !
 " It is not probable, but well may be."
 Again, there is another man, weighed now
 By twice eight years beyond the seven-times-ten,
 Appointed overweight to break our branch. 320
 And this man's loaded branch lifts, more than snow,
 All the world's cark and care, though a bird's nest
 Were a superfluous burthen : notably

Hath he been pressed, as if his age were youth,
From to-day's dawn till now that day departs, 325
Trying one question with true sweat of soul
"Shall the said doomed man fitlier die or live?"
When a straw swallowed in his posset, stool
Stumbled on where his path lies, any puff
That 's incident to such a smoking flax, 330
Hurries the natural end and quenches him!
Now calculate, thou sage, the chances here,
Say, which shall die the sooner, this or that?
"That, possibly, this in all likelihood."
I thought so : yet thou tripp'st, my foreign friend! 335
No, it will be quite otherwise,—to-day
Is Guido's last : my term is yet to run.

But say, the Swede were right, and I forthwith
Acknowledge a prompt summons and lie dead :
Why, then I stand already in God's face 340
And hear "Since by its fruit a tree is judged,
"Show me thy fruit, the latest act of thine!
"For in the last is summed the first and all,—
"What thy life last put heart and soul into,
"There shall I taste thy product." I must plead 345
This condemnation of a man to-day.

Not so ! Expect nor question nor reply
At what we figure as God's judgment-bar !
None of this vile way by the barren words
Which, more than any deed, characterize 350
Man as made subject to a curse : no speech—
That still bursts o'er some lie which lurks inside,
As the split skin across the coppery snake,
And most denotes man ! since, in all beside,
In hate or lust or guile or unbelief, 355
Out of some core of truth the excrescence comes,
And, in the last resort, the man may urge

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK X

"So was I made, a weak thing that gave way
 "To truth, to impulse only strong since true,
 "And hated, lusted, used guile, forwent faith." 360

But when man walks the garden of this world
 For his own solace, and, unchecked by law,
 Speaks or keeps silence as himself sees fit,
 Without the least incumbency to lie,

—Why, can he tell you what a rose is like, 365
 Or how the birds fly, and not slip to false
 Though truth serve better? Man must tell his
 mate

Of you, me and himself, knowing he lies,
 Knowing his fellow knows the same,—will think
 "He lies, it is the method of a man!" 370

And yet will speak for answer "It is truth"
 To him who shall rejoin "Again a lie!"
 Therefore these filthy rags of speech, this coil
 Of statement, comment, query and response,
 Tatters all too contaminate for use, 375

Have no renewing: He, the Truth, is, too,
 The Word. We men, in our degree, may know
 There, simply, instantaneously, as here
 After long time and amid many lies,
 Whatever we dare think we know indeed 380

—That I am I, as He is He,—what else?
 But be man's method for man's life at least!
 Wherefore, Antonio Pignatelli, thou
 My ancient self, who wast no Pope so long
 But studiedst God and man, the many years 385

I' the school, i' the cloister, in the diocese
 Domestic, legate-rule in foreign lands,—
 Thou other force in those old busy days
 Than this grey ultimate decrepitude,—
 Yet sensible of fires that more and more 390

Visit a soul, in passage to the sky,
 Left nakeder than when flesh-robe was new—

Thou, not Pope but the mere old man o' the world,
 Supposed inquisitive and dispassionate,
 Wilt thou, the one whose speech I somewhat trust, 395
 Question the after-me, this self now Pope,
 Hear his procedure, criticize his work?
 Wise in its generation is the world.

This is why Guido is found reprobate.
 I see him furnished forth for his career, 400
 On starting for the life-chance in our world,
 With nearly all we count sufficient help :
 Body and mind in balance, a sound frame,
 A solid intellect : the wit to seek,
 Wisdom to choose, and courage wherewithal 405
 To deal in whatsoever circumstance
 Should minister to man, make life succeed.
 Oh, and much drawback ! what were earth without?
 Is this our ultimate stage, or starting-place
 To try man's foot, if it will creep or climb, 410
 'Mid obstacles in seeming, points that prove
 Advantage for who vaults from low to high
 And makes the stumbling-block a stepping-stone ?
 So, Guido, born with appetite, lacks food :
 Is poor, who yet could deftly play-off wealth : 415
 Straitened, whose limbs are restless till at large.
 He, as he eyes each outlet of the cirque
 And narrow penfold for probation, pines
 After the good things just outside its grate,
 With less monition, fainter conscience-twitch, 420
 Rarer instinctive qualm at the first feel
 Of greed unseemly, prompting grasp undue,
 Than nature furnishes her main mankind,—
 Making it harder to do wrong than right
 The first time, careful lest the common ear 425
 Break measure, miss the outstep of life's march.
 Wherein I see a trial fair and fit

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK X

For one else too unfairly fenced about,
 Set above sin, beyond his fellows here :
 Guarded from the arch-tempter all must fight, 430
 By a great birth, traditionary name,
 Diligent culture, choice companionship,
 Above all, conversancy with the faith
 Which puts forth for its base of doctrine just
 "Man is born nowise to content himself, 435
 "But please God." He accepted such a rule,
 Recognized man's obedience ; and the Church,
 Which simply is such rule's embodiment,
 He clave to, he held on by,—nay, indeed,
 Near pushed inside of, deep as layman durst, 440
 Professed so much of priesthood as might sue
 For priest's-exemption where the layman sinned,—
 Got his arm frocked which, bare, the law would
 bruise.

Hence, at this moment, what 's his last resource,
 His extreme stay and utmost stretch of hope 445
 But that,—convicted of such crime as law
 Wipes not away save with a worldling's blood,—
 Guido, the three-parts consecrate, may 'scape ?
 Nay, the portentous brothers of the man
 Are veritably-priests, protected each 450
 May do his murder in the Church's pale,
 Abate Paul, Canon Girolamo !
 This is the man proves irreligiousest
 Of all mankind, religion's parasite !
 This may forsooth plead dinned ear, jaded sense, 455
 The vice o' the watcher who bides near the bell,
 Sleeps sound because the clock is vigilant,
 And cares not whether it be shade or shine,
 Doling out day and night to all men else !
 Why was the choice o' the man to niche himself 460
 Perversely 'neath the tower where Time's own
 tongue



PORTRAIT OF POPE INNOCENT XII

Born March 13 1615 Elected Pope July 1691 Died September 17, 1700

Thus undertakes to sermonize the world ?
Why, but because the solemn is safe too,
The belfry proves a fortress of a sort,
Has other uses than to teach the hour : 465
Turns sunscreen, paravent and ombrifuge
To whoso seeks a shelter in its pale,
—Ay, and attractive to unwary folk
Who gaze at storied portal, statued spire,
And go home with full head but empty purse, 470
Nor dare suspect the sacristan the thief !
Shall Judas,—hard upon the donor's heel,
To filch the fragments of the basket,—plead
He was too near the preacher's mouth, nor sat
Attent with fifties in a company ? 475
No,—closer to promulgated decree,
Clearer the censure of default. Proceed !

I find him bound, then, to begin life well ;
Fortified by propitious circumstance,
Great birth, good breeding, with the Church for
guide, 480
How lives he ? Cased thus in a coat of proof,
Mailed like a man-at-arms, though all the while
A puny starveling,—does the breast pant big,
The limb swell to the limit, emptiness
Strive to become solidity indeed ? 485
Rather, he shrinks up like the ambiguous fish,
Detaches flesh from shell and outside show,
And steals by moonlight (I have seen the thing)
In and out, now to prey and now to skulk.
Armour he boasts when a wave breaks on beach, 490
Or bird stoops for the prize : with peril nigh,—
The man of rank, the much-befriended-man,
The man almost affiliate to the Church,
Such is to deal with, let the world beware !
Does the world recognize, pass prudently ? 495

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK X

Do tides abate and sea-fowl hunt i' the deep ?
 Already is the slug from out its mew,
 Ignobly faring with all loose and free,
 Sand-fly and slush-worm at their garbage-feast,
 A naked blotch no better than they all : 500
 Guido has dropped nobility, slipped the Church,
 Plays trickster if not cut-purse, body and soul
 Prostrate among the filthy feeders—faugh !
 And when Law takes him by surprise at iast,
 Catches the foul thing on its carrion-prey, 505
 Behold, he points to shell left high and dry,
 Pleads “ But the case out yonder is myself ! ”
 Nay, it is thou, Law prongs amid thy peers,
 Congenial vermin ; that was none of thee,
 Thine outside,—give it to the soldier-crab ! 510

For I find this black mark impinge the man,
 That he believes in just the vile of life.
 Low instinct, base pretension, are these truth ?
 Then, that aforesaid armour, probity
 He figures in, is falsehood scale on scale ; 515
 Honour and faith,—a lie and a disguise,
 Probably for all livers in this world,
 Certainly for himself ! All say good words
 To who will hear, all do thereby bad deeds
 To who must undergo ; so thrive mankind ! 520
 See this habitual creed exemplified
 Most in the last deliberate act ; as last,
 So, very sum and substance of the soul
 Of him that planned and leaves one perfect
 piece,
 The sin brought under jurisdiction now, 525
 Even the marriage of the man : this act
 I sever from his life as sample, show
 For Guido's self, intend to test him by,
 As, from a cup filled fairly at the fount,

By the components we decide enough 530
Or to let flow as late, or staunch the source.

He purposes this marriage, I remark,
On no one motive that should prompt thereto—
Farthest, by consequence, from ends alleged
Appropriate to the action ; so they were : 535
The best, he knew and feigned, the worst he took.

Not one permissible impulse moves the man,
From the mere liking of the eye and ear,
To the true longing of the heart that loves,
No trace of these : but all to instigate, 540
Is what sinks man past level of the brute
Whose appetite if brutish is a truth.

All is the lust for money : to get gold,—
Why, lie, rob, if it must be, murder ! Make
Body and soul wring gold out, lured within 545
The clutch of hate by love, the trap's pretence !
What good else get from bodies and from souls ?
This got, there were some life to lead thereby,
—What, where or how, appreciate those who tell
How the toad lives : it lives,—enough for me ! 550

To get this good,—with but a groan or so,
Then, silence of the victims,—were the feat.
He foresaw, made a picture in his mind,—
Of father and mother stunned and echoless
To the blow, as they lie staring at fate's jaws 555
Their folly danced into, till the woe fell ;
Edged in a month by strenuous cruelty
From even the poor nook whence they watched
the wolf

Feast on their heart, the lamb-like child his prey ;
Plundered to the last remnant of their wealth, 560
(What daily pittance pleased the plunderer dole)
Hunted forth to go hide head, starve and die,
And leave the pale awe-stricken wife, past hope

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK X

Of help i' the world now, mute and motionless,
 His slave, his chattel, to first use, then destroy. 565
 All this, he bent mind how to bring about,
 Put plain in act and life, as painted plain,
 So have success, reach crown of earthly good,
 In this particular enterprise of man,
 By marriage—undertaken in God's face 570
 With all these lies so opposite God's truth,
 For end so other than man's end.

Thus schemes

Guido, and thus would carry out his scheme :
 But when an obstacle first blocks the path, 575
 When he finds none may boast monopoly
 Of lies and trick i' the tricking lying world,—
 That sorry timid natures, even this sort
 O' the Comparini, want nor trick nor lie
 Proper to the kind,—that as the gor-crow treats 580
 The bramble-finch so treats the finch the moth,
 And the great Guido is minutely matched
 By this same couple,—whether true or false
 The revelation of Pompilia's birth,
 Which in a moment brings his scheme to nought,— 585
 Then, he is piqued, advances yet a stage,
 Leaves the low region to the finch and fly,
 Soars to the zenith whence the fiercer fowl
 May dare the inimitable swoop. I sec.
 He draws now on the curious crime, the fine 590
 Felicity and flower of wickedness ;
 Determines, by the utmost exercise
 Of violence, made safe and sure by craft,
 To satiate malice, pluck one last arch-pang
 From the parents, else would triumph out of reach, 595
 By punishing their child, within reach yet,
 Who, by thought, word or deed, could nowise
 wrong

I' the matter that now moves him. So plans he,
Always subordinating (note the point !)
Revenge, the manlier sin, to interest 600
The meaner,—would pluck pang forth, but un-
clench

No gripe in the act, let fall no money-piece.
Hence a plan for so plaguing, body and soul,
His wife, so putting, day by day, hour by hour,
The untried torture to the untouched place, 605
As must precipitate an end foreseen,
Goad her into some plain revolt, most like
Plunge upon patent suicidal shame,
Death to herself, damnation by rebound
To those whose hearts he, holding hers, holds
still : 610

Such plan as, in its bad completeness, shall
Ruin the three together and alike,
Yet leave himself in luck and liberty,
No claim renounced, no right a forfeiture,
His person unendangered, his good fame 615
Without a flaw, his pristine worth intact,—
While they, with all their claims and rights that
cling,

Shall forthwith crumble off him every side,
Scorched into dust, a plaything for the winds.
As when, in our Campagna, there is fired 620
The nest-like work that overruns a hut ;
And, as the thatch burns here, there, everywhere,
Even to the ivy and wild vine, that bound
And blessed the home where men were happy
once,

There rises gradual, black amid the blaze, 625
Some grim and unscathed nucleus of the nest,—
Some old malicious tower, some obscene tomb
They thought a temple in their ignorance,
And clung about and thought to lean upon—

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK X

There laughs it o'er their ravage,—where are
they? 630

So did his cruelty burn life about,
And lay the ruin bare in dreadfulness,
Try the persistency of torment so
Upon the wife, that, at extremity,
Some crisis brought about by fire and flame, 635
The patient frenzy-stung must needs break loose,
Fly anyhow, find refuge anywhere,
Even in the arms of who should front her first,
No monster but a man—while nature shrieked
“Or thus escape, or die!” The spasm arrived, 640
Not the escape by way of sin,—O God,
Who shall pluck sheep Thou holdest, from Thy
hand?

Therefore she lay resigned to die,—so far
The simple cruelty was foiled. Why then,
Craft to the rescue, let craft supplement 645
Cruelty and show hell a masterpiece!
Hence this consummate lie, this love-intrigue,
Unmanly simulation of a sin,
With place and time and circumstance to suit—
These letters false beyond all forgery— 650
Not just handwriting and mere authorship,
But false to body and soul they figure forth—
As though the man had cut out shape and shape
From fancies of that other Aretine,
To paste below—incorporate the filth 655
With cherub faces on a missal-page!

Whereby the man so far attains his end
That strange temptation is permitted,—see!
Pompilia wife, and Caponsacchi priest,
Are brought together as nor priest nor wife 660
Should stand, and there is passion in the place,
Power in the air for evil as for good,

Promptings from heaven and hell, as if the stars
Fought in their courses for a fate to be.
Thus stand the wife and priest, a spectacle, 665
I doubt not, to unseen assemblage there.
No lamp will mark that window for a shrine,
No tablet signalize the terrace, teach
New generations which succeed the old
The pavement of the street is holy ground ; 670
No bard describe in verse how Christ prevailed
And Satan fell like lightning ! Why repine ?
What does the world, told truth, but lie the more ?

A second time the plot is foiled ; nor, now,
By corresponding sin for countercheck, 675
No wile and trick that baffle trick and wile,—
The play o' the parents ! Here the blot is blanced
By God's gift of a purity of soul
That will not take pollution, ermine-like
Armed from dishonour by its own soft snow. 680
Such was this gift of God who showed for once
How He would have the world go white : it seems
As a new attribute were born of each
Champion of truth, the priest and wife I praise,—
As a new safeguard sprang up in defence 685
Of their new noble nature : so a thorn
Comes to the aid of and completes the rose.—
Courage to-wit, no woman's gift nor priest's,
I' the crisis ; might leaps vindicating right.
See how the strong aggressor, bad and bold, 690
With every vantage, preconcerts surprise,
Leaps of a sudden at his victim's throat
In a byeway,—how fares he when face to face
With Caponsacchi ? Who fights, who fears now ?
There quails Count Guido armed to the chattering
teeth, 695
Cowers at the steadfast eye and quiet word

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK X

O' the Canon of the Pieve ! There skulks crime
 Behind law called in to back cowardice :
 While out of the poor trampled worm the wife,
 Springs up a serpent ! 700

But anon of these.

Him I judge now,—of him proceed to note,
 Failing the first, a second chance befriends
 Guido, gives pause ere punishment arrive.
 The law he called, comes, hears, adjudicates, 705
 Nor does amiss i' the main,—secludes the wife
 From the husband, respites the oppressed one,
 grants

Probation to the oppressor, could he know
 The mercy of a minute's fiery purge !
 The furnace-coals alike of public scorn, 710
 Private remorse, heaped glowing on his head,
 What if,—the force and guile, the ore's alloy,
 Eliminate, his baser soul refined—

The lost be saved even yet, so as by fire ?
 Let him, rebuked, go softly all his days, 715
 And, when no graver musings claim their due,
 Meditate on a man's immense mistake
 Who, fashioned to use feet and walk, deigns
 crawl—

Takes the unmanly means—ay, though to ends
 Man scarce should make for, would but reach
 thro' wrong,— 720

May sin, but nowise needs shame manhood so :
 Since fowlers hawk, shoot, nay and snare the game,
 And yet eschew vile practice, nor find sport
 In torch-light treachery or the luring owl.

But how hunts Guido ? Why, the fraudulent trap— 725
 Late spurned to ruin by the indignant feet
 Of fellows in the chase who loved fair play—

Here he picks up its fragments to the least,
Lades him and hies to the old lurking-place
Where haply he may patch again, refit 730
The mischief, file its blunted teeth anew,
Make sure, next time, first snap shall break the
bone.

Craft, greed and violence complot revenge :
Craft, for its quota, schemes to bring about
And seize occasion and be safe withal : 735
Greed craves its act may work both far and near,
Crush the tree, branch and trunk and root, beside.
Whichever twig or leaf arrests a streak
Of possible sunshine else would coin itself,
And drop down one more gold piece in the path : 740
Violence stipulates " Advantage proved
" And safety sure, be pain the overplus !
" Murder with jagged knife ! Cut but tear too !
" Foiled oft, starved long, glut malice for amends !"
And what, craft's scheme ? scheme sorrowful and
strange 745

As though the elements, whom mercy checked,
Had mustered hate for one eruption more,
One final deluge to surprise the Ark
Cradled and sleeping on its mountain-top :
Their outbreak-signal- what but the dove's coo, 750
Back with the olive in her bill for news
Sorrow was over ? 'T is an infant's birth,
Guido's first born, his son and heir, that gives
The occasion : other men cut free their souls
From care in such a case, fly up in thanks 755
To God, reach, recognize His love for once :
Guido cries " Soul, at last the mire is thine !
" Lie there in likeness of a money-bag
" My babe's birth so pins down past moving now,
" That I dare cut adrift the lives I late 760
" Scrupled to touch lest thou escape with them !

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK X

"These parents and their child my wife,—touch
one,

"Lose all! Their rights determined on a head

"I could but hate, not harm, since from each hair

"Dangled a hope for me: now—chance and
change!

765

"No right was in their child but passes plain

"To that child's child and through such child
to me.

"I am a father now,—come what, come will,

"I represent my child; he comes between—

"Cuts sudden off the sunshine of this life

770

"From those three: why, the gold is in his curls!

"Not with old Pietro's, Violante's head,

"Not his grey horror, her more hideous black—

"Go these, devoted to the knife!"

'T is done: 775

Wherefore should mind misgive, heart hesitate?

He calls to counsel, fashions certain four

Colourless natures counted clean till now,

—Rustic simplicity, uncorrupted youth,

Ignorant virtue! Here 's the gold o' the prime 780

When Saturn ruled, shall shock our leaden day—

The clown abash the courtier! Mark it, bards!

The courtier tries his hand on clownship here,

Speaks a word, names a crime, appoints a price,—

Just breathes on what, suffused with all himself, 785

Is red-hot henceforth past distinction now

I' the common glow of hell. And thus they break

And blaze on us at Rome, Christ's birthnight-eve!

Oh angels that sang erst "On the earth, peace!

"To man, good will!"—such peace finds earth
to-day!

790

After the seventeen hundred years, so man

Wills good to man, so Guido makes complete

His murder! what is it I said?—cuts loose

Three lives that hitherto he suffered cling,
 Simply because each served to nail secure, 795
 By a corner of the money-bag, his soul,—
 Therefore, lives sacred till the babe's first breath
 O'erweights them in the balance,—off they fly !

So is the murder managed, sin conceived
 To the full : and why not crowned with triumph
 too ? 800

Why must the sin, conceived thus, bring forth
 death ?

I note how, within hair's-breadth of escape,
 Impunity and the thing supposed success,
 Guido is found when the check comes, the change,
 The monitory touch o' the tether—felt 805

By few, not marked by many, named by none
 At the moment, only recognized aright
 I' the fulness of the days, for God's, lest sin
 Exceed the service, leap the line : such check—
 A secret which this life finds hard to keep, 810

And, often guessed, is never quite revealed—
 Needs must trip Guido on a stumbling-block
 Too vulgar, too absurdly plain i' the path !

Study this single oversight of care,
 This hebetude that marred sagacity, 815
 Forgetfulness of all the man best knew,—

How any stranger having need to fly,
 Needs but to ask and have the means of flight.

Why, the first urchin tells you, to leave Rome,
 Get horses, you must show the warrant, just 820

The banal scrap, clerk's scribble, a fair word buys,
 Or foul one, if a ducat sweeten word,—

And straight authority will back demand,
 Give you the pick o' the post-house !—how should
 he,

Then, resident at Rome for thirty years, 825

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK X

Guido, instruct a stranger ! And himself
 Forgets just this poor paper scrap, wherewith
 Armed, every door he knocks at opens wide
 To save him : horsed and manned, with such
 advance

O' the hunt behind, why, 't were the easy task 830
 Of hours told on the fingers of one hand,
 To reach the Tuscan frontier, laugh at-home,
 Light-hearted with his fellows of the place,—
 Prepared by that strange shameful judgment, that
 Satire upon a sentence just pronounced 835
 By the Rota and confirmed by the Granduke,—
 Ready in a circle to receive their peer,
 Appreciate his good story how, when Rome,
 The Pope-King and the populace of priests
 Made common cause with their confederate 840
 The other priestling who seduced his wife,
 He, all unaided, wiped out the affront
 With decent bloodshed and could face his friends,
 Frolic it in the world's eye. Ay, such tale
 Missed such applause, and by such oversight ! 845
 So, tired and footsore, those blood-flustered five
 Went reeling on the road through dark and cold,
 The few permissible miles, to sink at length,
 Wallow and sleep in the first wayside straw,
 As the other herd quenched, i' the wash o' the
 wave, 850

—Each swine, the devil inside him : so slept they,
 And so were caught and caged—all through one
 trip,

One touch of fool in Guido the astute !
 He curses the omission, I surmise,
 More than the murder. Why, thou fool and blind, 855
 It is the mercy-stroke that stops thy fate,
 Hamstrings and holds thee to thy hurt,—but how?
 On the edge o' the precipice ! One minute more,

Thou hadst gone farther and fared worse, my son,
Fathoms down on the flint and fire beneath ! 860
Thy comrades each and all were of one mind,
Thy murder done, to straightway murder thee
In turn, because of promised pay withheld.
So, to the last, greed found itself at odds
With craft in thee, and, proving conqueror, 865
Had sent thee, the same night that crowned thy
hope,
Thither where, this same day, I see thee not,
Nor, through God's mercy, need, to-morrow, see.

Such I find Guido, midmost blotch of black
Discernible in this group of clustered crimes 870
Huddling together in the cave they call
Their palace, outraged day thus penetrates.
Around him ranged, now close and now remote,
Prominent or obscure to meet the needs
O' the mage and master, I detect each shape 875
Subsidiary i' the scene nor loathed the less,
All alike coloured, all descried akin
By one and the same pitchy furnace stirred
At the centre: see, they lick the master's hand,—
This fox-faced horrible priest, this brother-brute 880
The Abate,—why, mere wolfishness looks well,
Guido stands honest in the red o' the flame,
Beside this yellow that would pass for white,
Twice Guido, all craft but no violence,
This copier of the mien and gait and garb 885
Of Peter and Paul, that he may go disguised,
Rob halt and lame, sick folk i' the temple-porch !
Armed with religion, fortified by law,
A man of peace, who trims the midnight lamp
And turns the classic page—and all for craft, 890
All to work harm with, yet incur no scratch !
While Guido brings the struggle to a close,

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK X

Paul steps back the due distance, clear o' the trap
 He builds and baits. Guido I catch and judge ;
 Paul is past reach in this world and my time : 895
 That is a case reserved. Pass to the next,
 The boy of the brood, the young Girolamo,
 Priest, Canon, and what more ? nor wolf nor fox,
 But hybrid, neither craft nor violence
 Wholly, part violence part craft : such cross 900
 Tempts speculation—will both blend one day,
 And prove hell's better product ? Or subside
 And let the simple quality emerge,
 Go on with Satan's service the old way ?
 Meanwhile, what promise, —what performance too ! 905
 For there 's a new distinctive touch, I see,
 Lust—lacking in the two—hell's own blue tint
 That gives a character and marks the man
 More than a match for yellow and red. Once more,
 A case reserved: why should I doubt ? Then comes 910
 The gaunt grey nightmare in the furthest smoke,
 The hag that gave these three abortions birth,
 Unmotherly mother and unwomanly
 Woman, that near turns motherhood to shame,
 Womanliness to loathing : no one word, 915
 No gesture to curb cruelty a whit
 More than the she-pard thwarts her playsome
 whelps
 Trying their milk-teeth on the soft o' the throat
 O' the first fawn, flung, with those beseeching eyes,
 Flat in the covert ! How should she but couch, 920
 Lick the dry lips, unsheath the blunted claw,
 Catch 'twixt her placid eyewinks at what chance
 Old bloody half-forgotten dream may flit,
 Born when herself was novice to the taste,
 The while she lets youth take its pleasure. Last, 925
 These God-abandoned wretched lumps of life,
 These four companions,—country-folk this time,

Not tainted by the unwholesome civic breath,
Much less the curse o' the Court! Mere strip-
lings too,

Fit to do human nature justice still! 930

Surely when impudence in Guido's shape
Shall propose crime and proffer money's-worth
To these stout tall rough bright-eyed black-haired
boys,

The blood shall bound in answer to each cheek
Before the indignant outcry break from lip! 935

Arc these i' the mood to murder, hardly loosed
From healthy autumn-finish of ploughed glebe,
Grapes in the barrel, work at happy end,
And winter near with rest and Christmas play?

How greet they Guido with his final task— 940

(As if he but proposed "One vineyard more
"To dig, ere frost come, then relax indeed!")

"Anywhere, anyhow and anyway,

"Murder me some three people, old and young,

"Ye never heard the names of,—and be paid 945

"So much!" And the whole four accede at once.

Demur? Do cattle bidden march or halt?

Is it some lingering habit, old fond faith

I' the lord o' the land, instructs them, -- birthright
badge

Of feudal tenure claims its slaves again? 950

Not so at all, thou noble human heart!

All is done purely for the pay,—which, earned,

And not forthcoming at the instant, makes

Religion heresy, and the lord o' the land

Fit subject for a murder in his turn. 955

The patron with cut throat and rifled purse,

Deposited i' the roadside-ditch, his due,

Nought hinders each good fellow trudging home,

The heavier by a piece or two in poke,

And so with new zest to the common life, 960

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK X

Mattock and spade, plough-tail and waggon-shaft,
Till some such other piece of luck betide,
Who knows? Since this is a mere start in life,
And none of them exceeds the twentieth year.
Nay, more i' the background yet? Unnoticed forms 965
Claim to be classed, subordinately vile?

Complacent lookers-on that laugh,—perchance
Shake head as their friend's horse-play grows too
rough

With the mere child he manages amiss—
But would not interfere and make bad worse 970
For twice the fractious tears and prayers: thou
know'st

Civility better, Marzi-Medici,
Governor for thy kinsman the Granduke!
Fit representative of law, man's lamp
I' the magistrate's grasp full-flare, no rushlight-end 975
Sputtering 'twixt thumb and finger of the priest!

Whose answer to the couple's cry for help
Is a threat,—whose remedy of Pompilia's wrong,
A shrug o' the shoulder, and facetious word
Or wink, traditional with Tuscan wits, ~ 980
To Guido in the doorway. Laud to law!

The wife is pushed back to the husband, he
Who knows how these home-squabblings persecute
People who have the public good to mind,
And work best with a silence in the court! 985

Ah, but I save my word at least for thee,
Archbishop, who art under, i' the Church,
As I am under God,—thou, chosen by both
To do the shepherd's office, feed the sheep—
How of this lamb that panted at thy foot 990
While the wolf pressed on her within crook's reach?
Wast thou the hireling that did turn and flee?
With thee at least anon the little word!

Such denizens o' the cave now cluster round
 And heat the furnace sevenfold : time indeed 995
 A bolt from heaven should cleave roof and clear
 place,

Transfix and show the world, suspiring flame,
 The main offender, scar and brand the rest
 Hurrying, each miscreant to his hole : then flood
 And purify the scene with outside day— 1000
 Which yet, in the absolute drench of dark,
 Ne'er wants a witness, some stray beauty-beam
 To the despair of hell.

First of the first,
 Such I pronounce Pompilia, then as now 1005
 Perfect in whiteness : stoop thou down, my child,
 Give one good moment to the poor old Pope
 Heart-sick at having all his world to blame—
 Let me look at thee in the flesh as erst,
 Let me enjoy the old clean linen garb, 1010
 Not the new splendid vesture ! Armed and
 crowned,

Would Michael, yonder, be, nor crowned nor armed,
 The less pre-eminent angel ? Everywhere
 I see in the world the intellect of man,
 That sword, the energy his subtle spear, 1015
 The knowledge which defends him like a shield—
 Everywhere ; but they make not up, I think,
 The marvel of a soul like thine, earth's flower
 She holds up to the softened gaze of God !
 It was not given Pompilia to know much, 1020
 Speak much, to write a book, to move mankind,
 Be memorized by who records my time.
 Yet it in purity and patience, if
 In faith held fast despite the plucking fiend,
 Safe like the signet stone with the new name 1025
 That saints are known by,—if in right returned

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK X

For wrong, most pardon for worst injury,
If there be any virtue, any praise,—
Then will this woman-child have proved—who
knows?—

Just the one prize vouchsafed unworthy me, 1030
Seven years a gardener of the untoward ground,
I till,—this earth, my sweat and blood manure
All the long day that barrenly grows dusk :
At least one blossom makes me proud at eve
Born 'mid the briers of my enclosure ! Still 1035
(Oh, here as elsewhere, nothingness of man !)
Those be the plants, imbedded yonder South
To mellow in the morning, those made fat
By the master's eye, that yield such timid leaf,
Uncertain bud, as product of his pains ! 1 40
While—see how this mere chance-sown cleft-nursed
seed

That sprang up by the wayside 'neath the foot
Of the enemy, this breaks all into blaze,
Spreads itself, one wide glory of desire
To incorporate the whole great sun it loves 1 45
From the inch-height whence it looks and longs !

My flower,

My rose, I gather for the breast of God,
This I praise most in thee, where all I praise,
That having been obedient to the end
According to the light allotted, law 1 50
Prescribed thy life, still tried, still standing test,—
Dutiful to the foolish parents first,
Submissive next to the bad husband,—nay,
Tolerant of those meaner miserable
That did his hests, eked out the dole of pain,— 1055
Thou, patient thus, couldst rise from law to law,
The old to the new, promoted at one cry
O' the trump of God to the new service, not
To longer bear, but henceforth fight, be found

Sublime in new impatience with the foe ! 1060
Endure man and obey God : plant firm foot
On neck of man, tread man into the hell
Meet for him, and obey God all the more !
Oh child that didst despise thy life so much
When it seemed only thine to keep or lose, 1065
How the fine ear felt fall the first low word
“ Value life, and preserve life for My sake ! ”
Thou didst . . . how shall I say ? . . . receive
so long
The standing ordinance of God on earth,
What wonder if the novel claim had clashed 1070
With old requirement, seemed to supersede
Too much the customary law ? But, brave,
Thou at first prompting of what I call God,
And fools call Nature, didst hear, comprehend,
Accept the obligation laid on thee, 1075
Mother elect, to save the unborn child,
As brute and bird do, reptile and the fly,
Ay and, I nothing doubt, even tree, shrub, plant
And flower o’ the field, all in a common pact
To worthily defend the trust of trusts, 1080
Life from the Ever Living : didst resist—
Anticipate the office that is mine—
And with his own sword stay the upraised arm.
The endeavour of the wicked, and defend
Him who,—again in my default,—was there 1085
For visible providence : one less true than thou
To touch, i’ the past, less practised in the right,
Approved less far in all docility
To all instruction,—how had such an one
Made scruple “ Is this motion a decree ? ” 1090
It was authentic to the experienced ear
O’ the good and faithful servant. Go past me
And get thy praise,—and be not far to seek
Presently when I follow if I may !

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK X

And surely not so very much apart 1095
Need I place thee, my warrior-priest, — in whom
What if I gain the other rose, the gold,
We grave to imitate God's miracle,
Greet monarchs with, good rose in its degree?
Irregular noble 'scapegrace—son the same! 1100
Faulty—and peradventure ours the fault
Who still misteach, mislead, throw hook and line,
Thinking to land leviathan forsooth,
Tame the scaled neck, play with him as a bird,
And bind him for our maidens! Better bear 1105
The King of Pride go wantoning awhile,
Unplagued by cord in nose and thorn in jaw,
Through deep to deep, followed by all that shine,
Churning the blackness hoary: He who made
The comely terror, He shall make the sword 1110
To match that piece of netherstone his heart,
Ay, nor miss praise thereby; who else shut fire
I' the stone, to leap from mouth at sword's first
stroke,
In lamps of love and faith, the chivalry
That dares the right and disregards alike 1115
The yea and nay o' the world? Self-sacrifice,—
What if an idol took it? Ask the Church
Why she was wont to turn each Venus here, —
Poor Rome perversely lingered round, despite
Instruction, for the sake of purblind love, — 1120
Into Madonna's shape, and waste no whit
Of aught so rare on earth as gratitude!
All this sweet savour was not ours but thine,
Nard of the rock, a natural wealth we name
Incense, and treasure up as food for saints, 1125
When flung to us—whose function was to give
Not find the costly perfume. Do I smile?
Nay, Caponsacchi, much I find amiss,
Blameworthy, punishable in this freak

Of thine, this youth prolonged, though age was
ripe, 1130

This masquerade in sober day, with change
Of motley too,—now hypocrite's disguise,
Now fool's-costume: which lie was least like truth,
Which the ungainlier, more discordant garb
With that symmetric soul inside my son, 1135
The churchman's or the worldling's,—let him
judge,

Our adversary who enjoys the task !

I rather chronicle the healthy rage,—

When the first moan broke from the martyr-maid
At that uncaging of the beasts,—made bare 1140
My athlete on the instant, gave such good
Great undisguised leap over post and pale
Right into the mid-cirque, free fighting-place.

There may have been rash stripping—every rag
Went to the winds,—infringement manifold 1145
Of laws prescribed pudicity, I fear,

In this impulsive and prompt self-display !

Ever such tax comes of the foolish youth ;

Men mulct the wiser manhood, and suspect

No veritable star swims out of cloud. 1150

Bear thou such imputation, undergo

The penalty I nowise dare relax,—

Conventional chastisement and rebuke.

But for the outcome, the brave starry birth

Conciliating earth with all that cloud, 1155

Thank heaven as I do ! Ay, such championship

Of God at first blush, such prompt cheery thud

Of glove on ground that answers ringingly

The challenge of the false knight,—watch we long

And wait we vainly for its gallant like 1160

From those appointed to the service, sworn

His body-guard with pay and privilege—

White-cinct, because in white walks sanctity,

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK X

Red-socked, how else proclaim fine scorn of flesh,
 Unchariness of blood when blood faith begs ! 1165
 Where are the men-at-arms with cross on coat ?
 Aloof, bewraying their attire : whilst thou
 In mask and motley, pledged to dance not fight,
 Sprang'st forth the hero ! In thought, word and
 deed,
 How throughout all thy warfare thou wast pure, 1170
 I find it easy to believe : and if
 At any fateful moment of the strange
 Adventure, the strong passion of that strait,
 Fear and surprise, may have revealed too much,—
 As when a thundrous midnight, with black air 1175
 That burns, rain-drops that blister, breaks a spell,
 Draws out the excessive virtue of some sheathed
 Shut unsuspected flower that hoards and hides
 Immensity of sweetness,—so, perchance,
 Might the surprise and fear release too much 1180
 The perfect beauty of the body and soul
 Thou savedst in thy passion for God's sake,
 He who is Pity. Was the trial sore ?
 Temptation sharp ? Thank God a second time !
 Why comes temptation but for man to meet 1185
 And master and make crouch beneath his foot,
 And so be pedestaled in triumph ? Pray
 "Lead us into no such temptations, Lord !"
 Yea, but, O Thou whose servants are the bold,
 Lead such temptations by the head and hair, 1190
 Reluctant dragons, up to who dares fight,
 That so he may do battle and have praise !
 Do I not see the praise ?—that while thy mates
 Bound to deserve i' the matter, prove at need
 Unprofitable through the very pains 1195
 We gave to train them well and start them fair,—
 Are found too stiff, with standing ranked and
 ranged,

For onset in good earnest, too obtuse
 Of ear, through iteration of command,
 For catching quick the sense of the real cry,— 1200
 Thou, whose sword-hand was used to strike the lute,
 Whose sentry-station graced some wanton's gate,
 Thou didst push forward and show mettle, shame
 The laggards, and retrieve the day. Well done !
 Be glad thou hast let light into the world 1205
 Through that irregular breach o' the boundary,—
 see

The same upon thy path and march assured,
 Learning anew the use of soldiership,
 Self-abnegation, freedom from all fear,
 Loyalty to the life's end ! Ruminant, 1210
 Deserve the initiatory spasm,—once more
 Work, be unhappy but bear life, my son !

And troop you, somewhere 'twixt the best and
 worst,
 Where crowd the indifferent product, all too poor
 Makeshift, starved samples of humanity ! 1215
 Father and mother, huddle there and hide !
 A gracious eye may find you ! Foul and fair,
 Sadly mixed natures : self-indulgent,—yet
 Self-sacrificing too : how the love soars,
 How the craft, avarice, vanity and spite 1220
 Sink again ! So they keep the middle course,
 Slide into silly crime at unaware,
 Slip back upon the stupid virtue, stay
 Nowhere enough for being classed, I hope
 And fear. Accept the swift and rueful death, 1225
 Taught, somewhat sternlier than is wont, what
 waits

The ambiguous creature,—how the one black tuft
 Steadies the aim of the arrow just as well
 As the wide faultless white on the bird's breast !

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK X

Nay, you were punished in the very part 1230
That looked most pure of speck,—'t was honest
love

Betrayed you,—did love seem most worthy pains,
Challenge such purging, since ordained survive
When all the rest of you was done with? Go!
Never again elude the choice of tints! 1235
White shall not neutralize the black, nor good
Compensate bad in man, absolve him so:
Life's business being just the terrible choice.

So do I see, pronounce on all and some
Grouped for my judgment now,—profess no doubt 1240
While I pronounce: dark, difficult enough
The human sphere, yet eyes grow sharp by use,
I find the truth, dispart the shine from shade,
As a mere man may, with no special touch
O' the lynx-gift in each ordinary orb: 1245
Nay, if the popular notion class me right,
One of well-nigh decayed intelligence, -
What of that? Through hard labour and good will,
And habitude that gives a blind man sight
At the practised finger-ends of him, I do 1250
Discern, and dare decree in consequence,
Whatever prove the peril of mistake.
Whence, then, this quite new quick cold thrill,—
cloud-like,

This keen dread creeping from a quarter scarce
Suspected in the skies I nightly scan? 1255
What slacks the tense nerve, saps the wound-up
spring

Of the act that should and shall be, sends the mount
And mass o' the whole man's-strength,—con-
globed so late—

Shudderingly into dust, a moment's work?
While I stand firm, go fearless, in this world, 1260

For this life recognize and arbitrate,
 Touch and let stay, or else remove a thing,
 Judge "This is right, this object out of place,"
 Candle in hand that helps me and to spare,—
 What if a voice deride me, "Perk and pry!" 1265
 "Brighten each nook with thine intelligence!
 "Play the good householder, ply man and maid
 "With tasks prolonged into the midnight, test
 "Their work and nowise stint of the due wage
 "Each worthy worker: but with gyves and whip 1270
 "Pay thou misprision of a single point
 "Plain to thy happy self who lift'st the light,
 "Lament'st the darkling,—bold to all beneath!
 "What if thyself adventure, now the place
 "Is purged so well? Leave pavement and mount
 roof, 1275
 "Look round thee for the light of the upper sky,
 "The fire which lit thy fire which finds default
 "In Guido Franceschini to his cost!
 "What if, above in the domain of light,
 "Thou miss the accustomed signs, remark eclipse? 1280
 "Shalt thou still gaze on ground nor lift a lid,—
 "Steady in thy superb prerogative,
 "Thy inch of inkling,—nor once face the doubt
 "I' the sphere above thee, darkness to be felt!"

Yet my poor spark had for its source, the sun; 1285
 Thither I sent the great looks which compel
 Light from its fount: all that I do and am
 Comes from the truth, or seen or else surmised,
 Remembered or divined, as mere man may:
 I know just so, nor otherwise. As I know, 1290
 I speak,—what should I know, then, and how speak
 Were there a wild mistake of eye or brain
 As to recorded governance above?
 If my own breath, only, blew coal alight

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK X

I styled celestial and the morning-star ? 1295
 I, who in this world act resolvedly,
 Dispose of men, their bodies and their souls,
 As they acknowledge or gainsay the light
 I show them,—shall I too lack courage?—leave
 I, too, the post of me, like those I blame ? 1300
 Refuse, with kindred inconsistency,
 To grapple danger whereby souls grow strong?
 I am near the end ; but still not at the end ;
 All to the very end is trial in life :
 At this stage is the trial of my soul 1305
 Danger to face, or danger to refuse ?
 Shall I dare try the doubt now, or not dare ?

O Thou,—as represented here to me
 In such conception as my soul allows,—
 Under Thy measureless, my atom width !— 1310
 Man's mind, what is it but a convex glass
 Wherein are gathered all the scattered points
 Picked out of the immensity of sky,
 To re-unite there, be our heaven for earth,
 Our known unknown, our God revealed to man ? 1315
 Existent somewhere, somehow, as a whole ;
 Here, as a whole proportioned to our sense,—
 There, (which is nowhere, speech must babble
 thus !)

In the absolute immensity, the whole
 Appreciable solely by Thyself,— 1320
 Here, by the little mind of man, reduced
 To littleness that suits his faculty,
 In the degree appreciable too ;
 Between Thee and ourselves—nay even, again,
 Below us, to the extreme of the minute, 1325
 Appreciable by how many and what diverse
 Modes of the life Thou madest be ! (why live
 Except for love,—how love unless they know ?)

Each of them, only filling to the edge,
Insect or angel, his just length and breadth, 1330
Due facet of reflection,—full, no less,
Angel or insect, as Thou framedst things.
I it is who have been appointed here
To represent Thee, in my turn, on earth,
Just as, if new philosophy know aught, 1335
This one earth, out of all the multitude
Of peopled worlds, as stars are now supposed,—
Was chosen, and no sun-star of the swarm,
For stage and scene of Thy transcendent act
Beside which even the creation fades 1340
Into a puny exercise of power.
Choice of the world, choice of the thing I am,
Both emanate alike from Thy dread play
Of operation outside this our sphere
Where things are classed and counted small or
great,— 1345
Incomprehensibly the choice is Thine !
I therefore bow my head and take Thy place.
There is, beside the works, a tale of Thee
In the world's mouth, which I find credible :
I love it with my heart : unsatisfied, 1350
I try it with my reason, nor discept
From any point I probe and pronounce sound.
Mind is not matter nor from matter, but
Above,—leave matter then, proceed with mind !
Man's be the mind recognized at the height,— 1355
Leave the inferior minds and look at man !
Is he the strong, intelligent and good
Up to his own conceivable height ? Nowise.
Enough o' the low,—soar the conceivable height,
Find cause to match the effect in evidence, 1360
The work i' the world, not man's but God's ; leave
man !

Conjecture of the worker by the work :

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK X

Is there strength there?—enough : intelligence ?
 Ample : but goodness in a like degree ?
 Not to the human eye in the present state, 1365
 An isoscele deficient in the base.
 What lacks, then, of perfection fit for God
 But just the instance which this tale supplies
 Of love without a limit ? So is strength,
 So is intelligence ; let love be so, 1370
 Unlimited in its self-sacrifice,
 Then is the tale true and God shows complete.
 Beyond the tale, I reach into the dark,
 Feel what I cannot see, and still faith stands :
 I can believe this dread machinery 1375
 Of sin and sorrow, would confound me else,
 Devised,—all pain, at most expenditure
 Of pain by Who devised pain,—to evolve,
 By new machinery in counterpart,
 The moral qualities of man —how else ?— 1380
 To make him love in turn and be beloved,
 Creative and self-sacrificing too,
 And thus eventually God-like, (ay,
 “I have said ye are Gods,”—shall it be said for
 nought ?) .
 Enable man to wring, from out all pain, 1385
 All pleasure for a common heritage
 To all eternity : this may be surmised,
 The other is revealed,—whether a fact,
 Absolute, abstract, independent truth,
 Historic, not reduced to suit man’s mind,— 1390
 Or only truth reverberate, changed, made pass
 A spectrum into mind, the narrow eye,—
 The same and not the same, else unconceived—
 Though quite conceivable to the next grade
 Above it in intelligence,—as truth 1395
 Easy to man were blindness to the beast
 By parity of procedure,—the same truth

In a new form, but changed in either case :
What matter so intelligence be filled ?
To a child, the sea is angry, for it roars : 1400
Frost bites, else why the tooth-like fret on face ?
Man makes acoustics deal with the sea's wrath,
Explains the choppy cheek by chymic law,—
To man and child remains the same effect
On drum of ear and root of nose, change cause 1405
Never so thoroughly : so my heart be struck,
What care I,—by God's gloved hand or the bare ?
Nor do I much perplex me with aught hard,
Dubious in the transmitting of the tale,—
No, nor with certain riddles set to solve. 1410
This life is training and a passage ; pass,—
Still, we march over some flat obstacle
We made give way before us ; solid truth
In front of it, what motion for the world ?
The moral sense grows but by exercise. 1415
'T is even as man grew probatively
Initiated in Godship, set to make
A fairer moral world than this he finds,
Guess now what shall be known hereafter. Deal
Thus with the present problem : as we see, 1420
A faultless creature is destroyed, and sin
Has had its way i' the world where God should
rule.
Ay, but for this irrelevant circumstance
Of inquisition after blood, we see
Pompilia lost and Guido saved : how long ? 1425
For his whole life : how much is that whole life ?
We are not babes, but know the minute's worth,
And feel that life is large and the world small,
So, wait till life have passed from out the world.
Neither does this astonish at the end, 1430
That whereas I can so receive and trust,
Other men, made with hearts and souls the same,

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK X

Reject and disbelieve,—subordinate
 The future to the present,—sin, nor fear.
 This I refer still to the foremost fact, 1435
 Life is probation and the earth no goal
 But starting-point of man : compel him strive,
 Which means, in man, as good as reach the goal,—
 Why institute that race, his life, at all ?
 But this does overwhelm me with surprise, 1440
 Touch me to terror,—not that faith, the pearl,
 Should be let lie by fishers wanting food,—
 Nor, seen and handled by a certain few
 Critical and contemptuous, straight consigned
 To shore and shingle for the pebble it proves,— 1445
 But that, when haply found and known and named
 By the residue made rich for evermore,
 These,—that these favoured ones, should in a trice
 Turn, and with double zest go dredge for whelks,
 Mud-worms that make the savoury soup! Enough 1450
 O' the disbelievers, see the faithful few !
 How do the Christians here deport them, keep
 Their robes of white unspotted by the world ?
 What is this Aretine Archbishop, this
 Man under me as I am under God, 1455
 This champion of the faith, I armed and decked,
 Pushed forward, put upon a pinnacle,
 To show the enemy his victor,—see !
 What 's the best fighting when the couple close ?
 Pompilia cries, "Protect me from the wolf!" 1460
 He—"No, thy Guido is rough, heady, strong,
 "Dangerous to disquiet : let him bide !
 "He needs some bone to mumble, help amuse
 "The darkness of his den with : so, the fawn
 "Which limps up bleeding to my foot and lies, 1465
 "—Come to me, daughter!—thus I throw him
 back ! "

Have we misjudged here, over-armed our knight,

Given gold and silk where plain hard steel serves
best,

Enfeebled whom we sought to fortify,
Made an archbishop and undone a saint? 1470

Well, then, descend these heights, this pride of life,
Sit in the ashes with a barefoot monk

Who long ago stamped out the worldly sparks,
By fasting, watching, stone cell and wire scourge,
—No such indulgence as unknits the strength— 1475

These breed the tight nerve and tough cuticle,
And the world's praise or blame runs rillet-wise
Off the broad back and brawny breast, we know!

He meets the first cold sprinkle of the world,
And shudders to the marrow. "Save this child? 1480

"Oh, my superiors, oh, the Archbishop's self!

"Who was it dared lay hand upon the ark

"His betters saw fall nor put finger forth?

"Great ones could help yet help not : why should
small?

"I break my promise : let her break her heart !" 1485

These are the Christians not the worldlings, not
The sceptics, who thus battle for the faith!

If foolish virgins disobey and sleep,

What wonder? But, this time, the wise that watch,
Sell lamps and buy lutes, exchange oil for wine, 1490

The mystic Spouse betrays the Bridegroom here.

To our last resource, then! Since all flesh is weak,
Bind weaknesses together, we get strength :

The individual weighed, found wanting, try
Some institution, honest artifice 1495

Whereby the units grow compact and firm!

Each props the other, and so stand is made

By our embodied cowards that grow brave.

The Monastery called of Convertites,

Meant to help women because these helped
Christ,— 1500

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK X

A thing existent only while it acts,
 Does as designed, else a nonentity,—
 For what is an idea unrealized?—
 Pompilia is consigned to these for help.
 They do help : they are prompt to testify 1505
 To her pure life and saintly dying days.
 She dies, and lo, who seemed so poor, proves rich.
 What does the body that lives through helpfulness
 To women for Christ's sake ? The kiss turns bite,
 The dove's note changes to the crow's cry : judge! 1510
 "Seeing that this our Convent claims of right
 "What goods belong to those we succour, be
 "The same proved women of dishonest life,—
 "And seeing that this Trial made appear
 "Pompilia was in such predicament,— 1515
 "The Convent hereupon pretends to said
 "Succession of Pompilia, issues writ,
 "And takes possession by the Fisc's advice."
 Such is their attestation to the cause
 Of Christ, who had one saint at least, they hoped : 1520
 But, is a title-deed to filch, a corpse
 To slander, and an infant-heir to cheat ?
 Christ must give up his gains then ! They unsay
 All the fine speeches,—who was saint is whore.
 Why, scripture yields no parallel for this ! 1525
 The soldiers only threw dice for Christ's coat ;
 We want another legend of the Twelve
 Disputing if it was Christ's coat at all,
 Claiming as prize the woof of price—for why ?
 The Master was a thief, purloined the same, 1530
 Or paid for it out of the common bag !
 Can it be this is end and outcome, all
 I take with me to show as stewardship's fruit,
 The best yield of the latest time, this year
 The seventeen-hundredth since God died for man ? 1535
 Is such effect proportionate to cause ?

And still the terror keeps on the increase
 When I perceive . . . how can I blink the fact?
 That the fault, the obduracy to good,
 Lies not with the impracticable stuff 1540
 Whence man is made, his very nature's fault,
 As if it were of ice the moon may gild
 Not melt, or stone 't was meant the sun should
 warm
 Not make bear flowers,—nor ice nor stone to
 blame :
 But it can melt, that ice, can bloom, that stone, 1545
 Impassible to rule of day and night !
 This terrifies me, thus compelled perceive,
 Whatever love and faith we looked should spring
 At advent or the authoritative star,
 Which yet lie sluggish, curdled at the source,— 1550
 These have leapt forth profusely in old time,
 These still respond with promptitude to-day,
 At challenge of—what unacknowledged powers
 O' the air, what uncommissioned meteors, warmth
 By law, and light by rule should supersede ? 1555
 For see this priest, this Caponsacchi, stung
 At the first summons,—“ Help for honour's sake,
 “ Play the man, pity the oppressed ! ”—no pause,
 How does he lay about him in the midst,
 Strike any foe, right wrong at any risk, 1560
 All blindness, bravery and obedience !—blind ?
 Ay, as a man would be inside the sun,
 Delirious with the plenitude of light
 Should interfuse him to the finger-ends—
 Let him rush straight, and how shall he go wrong ? 1565
 Where are the Christians in their panoply ?
 The loins we girt about with truth, the breasts
 Righteousness plated round, the shield of faith,
 The helmet of salvation, and that sword
 O' the Spirit, even the word of God,—where these ? 1570

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK X

Slunk into corners ! Oh, I hear at once
 Hubbub of protestation ! "What, we monks,
 "We friars, of such an order, such a rule,
 "Have not we fought, bled, left our martyr-mark
 "At every point along the boundary-line 1575
 "Twixt true and false, religion and the world,
 "Where this or the other dogma of our Church
 "Called for defence ?" And I, despite myself,
 How can I but speak loud what truth speaks low,
 "Or better than the best, or nothing serves ! 1580
 "What boots deed, I can cap and cover straight
 "With such another doughtiness to match,
 "Done at an instinct of the natural man ?"
 Immolate body, sacrifice soul too,—
 Do not these publicans the same ? Outstrip ! 1585
 Or else stop race you boast runs neck and neck,
 You with the wings, they with the feet,—for shame !
 Oh, I remark your diligence and zeal !
 Five years long, now, rounds faith into my ears,
 "Help thou, or Christendom is done to death !" 1590
 Five years since, in the Province of To-kien,
 Which is in China as some people know,
 Maigrot, my Viear Apostolic there,
 Having a great qualm, issues a decree.
 Alack, the converts use as God's name, not 1595
Tien-chu but plain *Tien* or else mere *Shang-ti*,
 As Jesuits please to fancy politic,
 While, say Dominicans, it calls down fire,—
 For *Tien* means heaven, and *Shang-ti*, supreme
 prince,
 While *Tien-chu* means the lord of heaven : all cry, 1600
 "There is no business urgent for despatch
 "As that thou send a legate, specially
 "Cardinal Tournon, straight to Peking, there
 "To settle and compose the difference !"
 So have I seen a potentate all fume 1605

For some infringement of his realm's just right,
 Some menace to a mud-built straw-thatched farm
 O' the frontier ; while inside the mainland lie,
 Quite undisputed-for in solitude,
 Whole cities plague may waste or famine sap : 1610
 What if the sun crumble, the sands encroach,
 While he looks on sublimely at his ease ?
 How does their ruin touch the empire's bound ?

And is this little all that was to be ?
 Where is the gloriously-decisive change, 1615
 Metamorphosis the immeasurable
 Of human clay to divine gold, we looked
 Should, in some poor sort, justify its price ?
 Had an adept of the mere Rosy Cross
 Spent his life to consummate the Great Work, 1620
 Would not we start to see the stuff it touched
 Yield not a grain more than the vulgar got
 By the old smelting-process years ago ?
 If this were sad to see in just the sage
 Who should profess so much, perform no more, 1625
 What is it when suspected in that Power
 Who undertook to make and made the world,
 Devised and did effect man, body and soul,
 Ordained salvation for them both, and yet . . .
 Well, is the thing we see, salvation ? 1630

I

Put no such dreadful question to myself,
 Within whose circle of experience burns
 The central truth, Power, Wisdom, Goodness,—
 God :

I must outlive a thing ere know it dead : 1635
 When I outlive the faith there is a sun,
 When I lie, ashes to the very soul,—
 Someone, not I, must wail above the heap,
 " He died in dark whence never morn arose."

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK X

While I see day succeed the deepest night— 1640
 How can I speak but as I know?—my speech
 Must be, throughout the darkness, “It will end :
 “The light that did burn, will burn !” Clouds
 obscure—

But for which obscuration all were bright?
 Too hastily concluded ! Sun-suffused, 1645
 A cloud may soothe the eye made blind by blaze,—
 Better the very clarity of heaven :
 The soft streaks are the beautiful and dear.
 What but the weakness in a faith supplies
 The incentive to humanity, no strength 1650
 Absolute, irresistible, comports ?
 How can man love but what he yearns to help ?
 And that which men think weakness within strength,
 But angels know for strength and stronger yet—
 What were it else but the first things made new, 1655
 But repetition of the miracle,
 The divine instance of self-sacrifice
 That never ends and aye begins for man ?
 So, never I miss footing in the maze,
 No,—I have light nor fear the dark at all. 1660

But are mankind not real, who pace outside
 My petty circle, world that 's measured me ?
 And when they stumble even as I stand,
 Have I a right to stop ear when they cry,
 As they were phantoms who took clouds for crags, 1665
 Tripped and fell, where man's march might safely
 move ?

Beside, the cry is other than a ghost's,
 When out of the old time there pleads some hard,
 Philosopher, or both, and—whispers not,
 But words it boldly. “The inward work and worth 1670
 “Of any mind, what other mind may judge
 “Save God who only knows the thing He made,

"The veritable service He exacts?
 "It is the outward product men appraise.
 "Behold, an engine hoists a tower aloft : 1675
 "'I looked that it should move the mountain too!'
 "Or else 'Had just a turret toppled down,
 "'Success enough!'—may say the Machinist
 "Who knows what less or more result might be :
 "But we, who see that done we cannot do, 1680
 "'A feat beyond man's force,' we men must say.
 "Regard me and that shake I gave the world !
 "I was born, not so long before Christ's birth
 "As Christ's birth haply did precede thy day,—
 "But many a watch before the star of dawn : 1685
 "Therefore I lived,—it is thy creed affirms,
 "Pope Innocent, who art to answer me !—
 "Under conditions, nowise to escape,
 "Whereby salvation was impossible.
 "Each impulse to achieve the good and fair, 1690
 "Each aspiration to the pure and true,
 "Being without a warrant or an aim,
 "Was just as sterile a felicity
 "As if the insect, born to spend his life
 "Soaring his circles, stopped them to describe 1695
 "'(Painfully motionless in the mid-air)
 "Some word of weighty counsel for man's sake
 "Some 'Know thyself' or 'Take the golden
 mean !'
 "—Forwent his happy dance and the glad ray,
 "Died half an hour the sooner and was dust. 1700
 "I, born to perish like the brutes, or worse,
 "Why not live brutishly, obey brutes' law ?
 "But I, of body as of soul complete,
 "A gymnast at the games, philosopher
 "I' the schools, who painted, and made music,
 —all 1705
 "Glories that met upon the tragic stage

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK X

"When the Third Poet's tread surprised the Two,—
 "Whose lot fell in a land where life was great
 "And sense went free and beauty lay profuse,
 "I, untouched by one adverse circumstance, 1710
 "Adopted virtue as my rule of life,
 "Waived all reward, loved but for loving's sake,
 "And, what my heart taught me, I taught the
 world,
 "And have been teaching now two thousand years.
 "Witness my work,—plays that should please,
 forsooth! 1715
 "'They might please, they may displease, they
 shall teach,
 "'For truth's sake,' so I said, and did, and do.
 "Five hundred years ere Paul spoke, Felix
 heard,—
 "How much of temperance and righteousness,
 "Judgment to come, did I find reason for, 1720
 "Corroborate with my strong style that spared
 "No sin, nor swerved the more from branding
 brow
 "Because the sinner was called Zeus and God?
 "How nearly did I guess at that Paul knew?
 "How closely come, in what I represent 1725
 "As duty, to his doctrine yet a blank?
 "And as that limner not untruly limns
 "Who draws an object round or square, which
 square
 "Or round seems to the unassisted eye,
 "Though Galileo's tube display the same 1730
 "Oval or oblong,—so, who controverts
 "I rendered rightly what proves wrongly wrought
 "Beside Paul's picture? Mine was true for me.
 "I saw that there are, first and above all,
 "The hidden forces, blind necessities, 1735
 "Named Nature, but the thing's self unconceived:

- “Then follow,—how dependent upon these,
“We know not, how imposed above ourselves,
“We well know,—what I name the gods, a power
“Various or one : for great and strong and good 1740
“Is there, and little, weak and bad there too,
“Wisdom and folly : say, these make no God,—
“What is it else that rules outside man's self?
“A fact then,—always, to the naked eye,—
“And so, the one revealment possible 1745
“Of what were unimagined else by man.
“Therefore, what gods do, man may criticize,
“Applaud, condemn,—how should he fear the
truth?—
“But likewise have in awe because of power,
“Venerate for the main munificence, 1750
“And give the doubtful deed its due excuse
“From the acknowledged creature of a day
“To the Eternal and Divine. Thus, bold
“Yet self-mistrusting, should man bear himself,
“Most assured on what now concerns him most— 1755
“The law of his own life, the path he prints,—
“Which law is virtue and not vice, I say,—
“And least inquisitive where search least skills,
“I' the nature we best give the clouds to keep
“What could I paint beyond a scheme like this 1760
“Out of the fragmentary truths where light
“Lay fitful in a tenebrific time?
“You have the sunrise now, joins truth to truth,
“Shoots life and substance into death and void ;
“Themselves compose the whole we made before : 1765
“The forces and necessity grow God,—
“The beings so contrarious that seemed gods,
“Prove just His operation manifold
“And multiform, translated, as must be,
“Into intelligible shape so far 1770
“As suits our sense and sets us free to feel.

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK X

“What if I let a child think, childhood-long,
 “That lightning, I would have him spare his eye,
 “Is a real arrow shot at naked orb?

“The man knows more, but shuts his lids the
 same :

“Lightning’s cause comprehends nor man nor
 child. 1775

“Why then, my scheme, your better knowledge
 broke,

“Presently re-adjusts itself, the small

“Proportioned largelier, parts and whole named
 new :

“So much, no more two thousand years have
 done ! 1785

“Pope, dost thou dare pretend to punish me,

“For not descrying sunshine at midnight,

“Me who crept all-fours, found my way so far—

“While thou rewardest teachers of the truth,

“Who miss the plain way in the blaze of noon,— 1785

“Though just a word from that strong style of
 mine,

“Grasped honestly in hand as guiding-stäff,

“Had pricked them a sure path across the bog,

“That mire of cowardice and slush of lies

“Wherein I find them wallow in wide day !” 1795

How should I answer this Euripides?

Paul,—’t is a legend,—answered Seneca,

But that was in the day-spring ; noon is now :

We have got too familiar with the light.

Shall I wish back once more that thrill of dawn ? 1795

When the whole truth-touched man burned up,
 one fire ?

—Assured the trial, fiery, fierce, but fleet,

Would, from his little heap of ashes, lend

Wings to that conflagration of the world

Which Christ awaits ere He makes all things new: 1800
 So should the frail become the perfect, rapt
 From glory of pain to glory of joy ; and so,
 Even in the end,—the act renouncing earth,
 Lands, houses, husbands, wives and children
 here,—

Begin that other act which finds all, lost, 1805
 Regained, in this time even, a hundredfold,
 And, in the next time, feels the finite love
 Blent and embalmed with the eternal life.

So does the sun ghastlily seem to sink
 In those north parts, lean all but out of life, 1810
 Desist a dread mere breathing-stop, then slow
 Re-assert day, begin the endless rise.

Was this too easy for our after-stage?
 Was such a lighting-up of faith, in life,
 Only allowed initiate, set man's step 1815
 In the true way by help of the great glow?

A way wherein it is ordained he walk,
 Bearing to see the light from heaven still more
 And more encroached on by the light of earth,
 Tentatives earth puts forth to rival heaven, 1820
 Earthly incitements that mankind serve God
 For man's sole sake, not God's and therefore
 man's.

Till at last, who distinguishes the sun
 From a mere Druid fire on a far mount?
 More praise to him who with his subtle prism 1825
 Shall decompose both beams and name the true.

In such sense, who is last proves first indeed ;
 For how could saints and martyrs fail see truth
 Streak the night's blackness? Who is faithful now?
 Who untwists heaven's white from the yellow flare 1830
 O' the world's gross torch, without night's foil that
 helped

Produce the Christian act so possible

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK X

When in the way stood Nero's cross and stake,—
So hard now when the world smiles "Right and
wise!

"Faith points the politic, the thrifty way, 1835

"Will make who plods it in the end returns

"Beyond mere fool's-sport and improvidence.

"We fools dance thro' the cornfield of this life,

"Pluck ears to left and right and swallow raw,

"—Nay, tread, at pleasure, a sheaf underfoot, 1840

"To get the better at some poppy-flower,—

"Well aware we shall have so much less wheat

"In the eventual harvest : you meantime

"Waste not a spike,—the richlier will you reap!

"What then? There will be always garnered meal 1845

"Sufficient for our comfortable loaf,

"While you enjoy the undiminished sack!"

Is it not this ignoble confidence,

Cowardly hardihood, that dulls and damps,

Makes the old heroism impossible? 1850

Unless . . . what whispers me of times to come?

What if it be the mission of that age

My death will usher into life, to shake

This torpor of assurance from our creed,

Re-introduce the doubt discarded, bring 1855

That formidable danger back, we drove

Long ago to the distance and the dark?

No wild beast now prowls round the infant camp:

We have built wall and sleep in city safe:

But if some earthquake try the towers that laugh 1860

To think they once saw lions rule outside,

And man stand out again, pale, resolute,

Prepared to die,—which means, alive at last?

As we broke up that old faith of the world,

Have we, next age, to break up this the new— 1865

Faith, in the thing, grown faith in the report—

Whence need to bravely disbelieve report
 Through increased faith i' the thing reports belie?
 Must we deny,—do they, these Molinists,
 At peril of their body and their soul,— 1870
 Recognized truths, obedient to some truth
 Unrecognized yet, but perceptible?—
 Correct the portrait by the living face,
 Man's God, by God's God in the mind of man?
 Then, for the few that rise to the new height, 1875
 The many that must sink to the old depth,
 The multitude found fall away! A few,
 E'en ere new law speak clear, may keep the old,
 Preserve the Christian level, call good good
 And evil evil, (even though razed and blank 1880
 The old titles,) helped by custom, habitude,
 And all else they mistake for finer sense
 O' the fact that reason warrants,—as before,
 They hope perhaps, fear not impossibility.
 At least some one Pompilia left the world 1885
 Will say "I know the right place by foot's feel,
 "I took it and tread firm there; wherefore change?"
 But what a multitude will surely fall
 Quite through the crumbling truth, late subjacent,
 Sink to the next discoverable base, 1890
 Rest upon human nature, settle there
 On what is firm, the lust and pride of life!
 A mass of men, whose very souls even now
 Seem to need re-creating,—so they slink
 Worm-like into the mud, light now lays bare,— 1895
 Whose future we dispose of with shut eyes
 And whisper—"They are grafted, barren twigs,
 "Into the living stock of Christ: may bear
 "One day, till when they lie death-like, not
 dead,"—
 Those who with all the aid of Christ succumb, 1900
 How, without Christ, shall they, unaided, sink?

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK X

Whither but to this gulf before my eyes?
 Do not we end, the century and I?
 The impatient antimasque treads close on kibe
 O' the very masque's self it will mock,—on me, 1905
 Last lingering personage, the impatient mime
 Pushes already,—will I block the way?
 Will my slow trail of garments ne'er leave space
 For pantaloon, sock, plume and castanet?
 Here comes the first experimentalist 1910
 In the new order of things,—he plays a priest;
 Does he take inspiration from the Church,
 Directly make her rule his law of life?
 Not he: his own mere impulse guides the man—
 Happily sometimes, since ourselves allow 1915
 He has danced, in gaiety of heart, i' the main
 The right step through the maze we bade him foot.
 But if his heart had prompted him break loose
 And mar the measure? Why, we must submit,
 And thank the chance that brought him safe so far. 1920
 Will he repeat the prodigy? Perhaps.
 Can he teach others how to quit themselves,
 Show why this step was right while that were
 wrong?
 How should he? "Ask your hearts as I asked
 mine,
 "And get discreetly through the morrice too; 1925
 "If your hearts misdirect you,—quit the stage,
 "And make amends,—be there amends to make!"
 Such is, for the Augustin that was once,
 This Canon Caponsacchi we see now.
 "But my heart answers to another tune," 1930
 Puts in the Abate, second in the suite,
 "I have my taste too, and tread no such step!
 "You choose the glorious life, and may, for me!
 "I like the lowest of life's appetites,—
 "So you judge,—but the very truth of joy 1935

"To my own apprehension which decides.
 "Call me knave and you get yourself called fool!
 "I live for greed, ambition, lust, revenge;
 "Attain these ends by force, guile: hypocrite,
 "To-day, perchance to-morrow recognized 1940
 "The rational man, the type of common sense."
 There's Loyola adapted to our time!
 Under such guidance Guido plays his part,
 He also influencing in the due turn
 These last clods where I track intelligence 1945
 By any glimmer, these four at his beck
 Ready to murder any, and, at their own,
 As ready to murder him,—such make the world!
 And, first effect of the new cause of things,
 There they lie also duly,—the old pair 1950
 Of the weak head and not so wicked heart,
 With the one Christian mother, wife and girl,
 —Which three gifts seem to make an angel up,—
 The world's first foot o' the dance is on their heads!
 Still, I stand here, not off the stage though close 1955
 On the exit: and my last act, as my first,
 I owe the scene, and Him who armed me thus
 With Paul's sword as with Peter's key. I smite
 With my whole strength once more, ere end my part.
 Ending, so far as man may, this offence. 1960
 And when I raise my arm, who plucks my sleeve?
 Who stops me in the righteous function,—foe
 Or friend? Oh, still as ever, friends are they
 Who, in the interest of outraged truth
 Deprecate such rough handling of a lie! 1965
 The facts being proved and incontestable,
 What is the last word I must listen to?
 Perchance—"Spare yet a term this barren stock
 "We pray thee dig about and dung and dress
 "Till he repent and bring forth fruit even yet!" 1970
 Perchance—"So poor and swift a punishment

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK X

"Shall throw him out of life with all that sin :
 "Let mercy rather pile up pain on pain
 "Till the flesh expiate what the soul pays else !"
 Nowise ! Remonstrants on each side commence 1975
 Instructing, there 's a new tribunal now
 Higher than God's—the educated man's !
 Nice sense of honour in the human breast
 Supersedes here the old coarse oracle—
 Confirming none the less a point or so 1980
 Wherein blind predecessors worked aright
 By rule of thumb : as when Christ said,—when,
 where ?
 Enough, I find it pleaded in a place,—
 "All other wrongs done, patiently I take :
 "But touch my honour and the case is changed ! 1985
 "I feel the due resentment,—*nemini*
 "*Honorem trado* is my quick retort."
 Right of Him, just as if pronounced to-day !
 Still, should the old authority be mute
 Or doubtful or in speaking clash with new, 1990
 The younger takes permission to decide.
 At last we have the instinct of the world
 Ruling its household without tutelage :
 And while the two laws, human and divine,
 Have busied finger with this tangled case, 1995
 In pushes the brisk junior, cuts the knot,
 Pronounces for acquittal. How it trips
 Silverly o'er the tongue ! "Remit the death !
 "Forgive, . . . well, in the old way, if thou please,
 "Decency and the relics of routine 2000
 "Respected,—let the Count go free as air !
 "Since he may plead a priest's immunity,—
 "The minor orders help enough for that,
 "With Farinacci's licence,—who decides
 "That the mere implication of such man, 2005
 "So privileged, in any cause, before

" Whatever Court except the Spiritual,
 " Straight quashes law-procedure,—quash it, then !
 " Remains a pretty loophole of escape
 " Moreover, that, beside the patent fact 2010
 " O' the law's allowance, there 's involved the weal
 " O' the Popedom : a son's privilege at stake,
 " Thou wilt pretend the Church's interest,
 " Ignore all finer reasons to forgive !
 " But herein lies the crowning cogency— 2015
 " (Let thy friends teach thee while thou tellest beads)
 " That in this case the spirit of culture speaks,
 " Civilization is imperative.
 " To her shall we remand all delicate points
 " Henceforth, nor take irregular advice 2020
 " O' the sly, as heretofore : she used to hint
 " Remonstrances, when law was out of sorts
 " Because a saucy tongue was put to rest,
 " An eye that roved was cured of arrogance :
 " But why be forced to mumble under breath 2025
 " What soon shall be acknowledged as plain fact,
 " Outspoken, say, in thy successor's time ?
 " Methinks we see the golden age return !
 " Civilization and the Emperor
 " Succeed to Christianity and Pope. 2030
 " One Emperor then, as one Pope now : mean-
 while,
 " Anticipate a little ! We tell thee 'Take
 " ' Guido's life, sapped society shall crash,
 " ' Whereof the main prop was, is, and shall be
 " ' —Supremacy of husband over wife ! ' 2035
 " Does the man rule i' the house, and may his mate
 " Because of any plea dispute the same ?
 " Oh, pleas of all sorts shall abound, be sure,
 " One but allowed validity,—for, harsh
 " And savage, for, inept and silly-sooth, 2040
 " For, this and that, will the ingenious sex

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK X

"Demonstrate the best master e'er graced slave :
 "And there's but one short way to end the coil,—
 "Acknowledge right and reason steadily
 "I' the man and master : then the wife submits 2045
 "To plain truth broadly stated. Does the time
 "Advise we shift—a pillar ? nay, a stake
 "Out of its place i' the social tenement ?
 "One touch may send a shudder through the heap
 "And bring it toppling on our children's heads ! 2050
 "Moreover, if ours breed a qualm in thee,
 "Give thine own better feeling play for once !
 "Thou, whose own life winks o'er the socket-edge,
 "Wouldst thou it went out in such ugly snuff
 "As dooming sons dead, e'en though justice
 prompt ? 2055
 "Why, on a certain feast, Barabbas' self
 "Was set free, not to cloud the general cheer :
 "Neither shalt thou pollute thy Sabbath close !
 "Mercy is safe and graceful. How one hears
 "The howl begin, scarce the three little taps 2060
 "O' the silver mallet silent on thy brow, —
 "His last act was to sacrifice a Count
 "And thereby screen a scandal of the Church !
 "Guido condemned, the Canon justified
 "Of course,—delinquents of his cloth go free !' 2065
 "And so the Luthers chuckle, Calvins scowl,
 "So thy hand helps Molinos to the chair
 "Whence he may hold forth till doom's day on just
 "These *petit-maitre* priestlings,—in the choir
 "*Sanctus et Benedictus*, with a brush 2070
 "Of soft guitar-strings that obey the thumb,
 "Touched by the bedside, for accompaniment !
 "Does this give umbrage to a husband ? Death
 "To the fool, and to the priest impunity !
 "But no impunity to any friend 2075
 "So simply over-loyal as these four

"Who made religion of their patron's cause,
 "Believed in him and did his bidding straight,
 "Asked not one question but laid down the lives
 "This Pope took, —all four lives together make 2080
 "Just his own length of days,—so, dead they lie,
 "As these were times when loyalty 's a drug,
 "And zeal in a subordinate too cheap
 "And common to be saved when we spend life!
 "Come, 't is too much good breath we waste in
 words : 2085
 "The pardon, Holy Father! Spare grimace,
 "Shrugs and reluctance! Are not we the world,
 "Art not thou Priam? Let soft culture plead
 "Hecuba-like, '*non tali*' (Virgil serves)
 "'*Auilio* and the rest! Enough, it works! 2090
 "The Pope relaxes, and the Prince is loth,
 "The father's bowels yearn, the man's will bends,
 "Reply is apt. Our tears on tremble, hearts
 "Big with a benediction, wait the word
 "Shall circulate thro' the city in a trice, 2095
 "Set every window flaring, give each man
 "O' the mob his torch to wave for gratitude.
 "Pronouncethen, for our breath and patience fail!"

I will, Sirs : but a voice other than yours
 Quickens my spirit. "*Quis pro Domino?*" 2100
 "Who is upon the Lord's side?" asked the Count.
 I, who write—

"On receipt of this command,
 "Acquaint Count Guido and his fellows four
 "They die to-morrow : could it be to-night, 2105
 "The better, but the work to do, takes time.
 "Set with all diligence a scaffold up,
 "Not in the customary place, by Bridge
 "Saint Angelo, where die the common sort ;
 "But since the man is noble, and his peers 2110

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK X

“By predilection haunt the People's Square,
“There let him be beheaded in the midst,
“And his companions hanged on either side :
“So shall the quality see, fear and learn.
“All which work takes time : till to-morrow, then, 2115
“Let there be prayer incessant for the five !”

For the main criminal I have no hope
Except in such a suddenness of fate.
I stood at Naples once, a night so dark
I could have scarce conjectured there was earth 2120
Anywhere, sky or sea or world at all :
But the night's black was burst through by a blaze—
Thunder struck blow on blow, earth groaned and
bore,
Through her whole length of mountain visible :
There lay the city thick and plain with spires, 2125
And, like a ghost disshrouded, white the sea.
So may the truth be flashed out by one blow,
And Guido see, one instant, and be saved.
Else I avert my face, nor follow him
Into that sad obscure sequestered state 2130
Where God unmakes but to remake the soul
He else made first in vain ; which must not be.
Enough, for I may die this very night :
And how should I dare die, this man let live ?

Carry this forthwith to the Governor ! 2135

XI.—GUIDO

You are the Cardinal Acciaiuoli, and you,
Abate Panciatichi—two good Tuscan names :
Acciaiuoli—ah, your ancestor it was
Built the huge battlemented convent-block
Over the little forky flashing Greve 5
That takes the quick turn at the foot o' the hill
Just as one first sees Florence : oh those days !
'T is Ema, though, the other rivulet,
The one-arched brown brick bridge yawns over
—yes,
Gallop and go five minutes, and you gain 10
The Roman Gate from where the Ema's bridged :
Kingfishers fly there : how I see the bend
O'erturreted by Certosa which he built,
That Senescal (we styled him) of your House !
I do adjure you, help me, Sirs ! My blood 15
Comes from as far a source : ought it to end
This way, by leakage through their scaffold-planks
Into Rome's sink where her red refuse runs ?
Sirs, I beseech you by blood-sympathy,
If there be any vile experiment 20
In the air,—if this your visit simply prove,
When all 's done, just a well-intentioned trick
That tries for truth truer than truth itself,
By startling up a man, ere break of day,
To tell him he must die at sunset,—pshaw ! 25
That man 's a Franceschini ; feel his pulse,
Laugh at your folly, and let 's all go sleep !
You have my last word,—innocent am I
As Innocent my Pope and murderer,

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK XI

Innocent as a babe, as Mary's own, 30
 As Mary's self,—I said, say and repeat,—
 And why, then, should I die twelve hours hence?
 I—

Whom, not twelve hours ago, the gaoler bade
 Turn to my straw-truss, settle and sleep sound
 That I might wake the sooner, promptlier pay 35
 His due of meat-and-drink-indulgence, cross
 His palm with fee of the good-hand, beside,
 As gallants use who go at large again !
 For why? All honest Rome approved my part ;
 Whoever owned wife, sister, daughter,—nay, 40
 Mistress,—had any shadow of any right
 That looks like right, and, all the more resolved,
 Held it with tooth and nail,—these manly men
 Approved ! I being for Rome, Rome was for me.
 Then, there 's the point reserved, the subterfuge 45
 My lawyers held by, kept for last resource,
 Firm should all else,—the impossible fancy!—fail,
 And sneaking burgess-spirit win the day.
 The knaves ! One plea at least would hold,—
 they laughed,—

One grappling-iron scratch the bottom-rock 50
 Even should the middle mud let anchor go !
 I hooked my cause on to the Clergy's,—plea
 Which, even if law tipped off my hat and plume,
 Revealed my priestly tonsure, saved me so.
 The Pope moreover, this old Innocent, 55
 Being so meek and mild and merciful,
 So fond o' the poor and so fatigued of earth,
 So . . . fifty thousand devils in deepest hell !
 Why must he cure us of our strange conceit
 Of the angel in man's likeness, that we loved 60
 And looked should help us at a pinch ? He help ?
 He pardon ? Here's his mind and message—
 death !

Thank the good Pope ! Now, is he good in this,
 Never mind, Christian,—no such stuff's extant,—
 But will my death do credit to his reign, 65
 Show he both lived and let live, so was good ?
 Cannot I live if he but like ? "The law !"
 Why, just the law gives him the very chance,
 The precise leave to let my life alone,
 Which the archangelic soul of him (he says) 70
 Yearns after ! Here they drop it in his palm,
 My lawyers, capital o' the cursed kind,—
 Drop life to take and hold and keep : but no !
 He sighs, shakes head, refuses to shut hand,
 Motions away the gift they bid him grasp, 75
 And of the coyness comes—that off I run
 And down I go, he best knows whither ! mind,
 He knows, who sets me rolling all the same !
 Disinterested Vicar of our Lord,
 This way he abrogates and disallows, 80
 Nullifies and ignores,—reverts in fine
 To the good and right, in detriment of me !
 Talk away ! Will you have the naked truth ?
 He 's sick of his life's supper,—swallowed lies :
 So, hobbling bedward, needs must ease his maw 85
 Just where I sit o' the door-sill. Sir Abate,
 Can you do nothing ? Friends, we used to frisk :
 What of this sudden slash in a friend's face,
 This cut across our good companionship
 That showed its front so gay when both were 90
 young ?
 Were not we put into a beaten path,
 Bid pace the world, we nobles born and bred,
 We body of friends with each his scutcheon full
 Of old achievement and impunity,—
 Taking the laugh of morn and Sol's salute 95
 As forth we fared, pricked on to breathe our steeds
 And take equestrian sport over the green

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK XI

Under the blue, across the crop,—what care?
 If we went prancing up hill and down dale,
 In and out of the level and the straight, 100
 By the bit of pleasant byeway, where was harm?
 Still Sol salutes me and the morning laughs:
 I see my grandsire's hoof-prints,—point the spot
 Where he drew rein, slipped saddle, and stabbed
 knave

For daring throw gibe—much less, stone—from
 pale: 105

Then back, and on, and up with the cavalcade.
 Just so wend we, now canter, now converse,
 Till, 'mid the jauncing pride and jaunty port,
 Something of a sudden jerks at somebody—
 A dagger is out, a flashing cut and thrust, 110
 Because I play some prank my grandsire played,
 And here I sprawl: where is the company? Gone!
 A trot and a trample! only I lie trapped,
 Writhe in a certain novel springe just set
 By the good old Pope: I 'm first prize. Warn
 me? Why? 115

Apprise me that the law o' the game is changed?
 Enough that I 'm a warning, as I writhe,
 'To all and each my fellows of the file,
 And make law plain henceforward past mistake,
 "For such a prank, death is the penalty!" 120
 Pope the Five Hundredth (what do I know or care?)
 Deputes your Eminency and Abateship
 To announce that, twelve hours from this time,
 he needs

I just essay upon my body and soul
 The virtue of his brand-new engine, prove 125
 Represser of the pranksome! I 'm the first!
 Thanks. Do you know what teeth you mean
 to try

The sharpness of, on this soft neck and throat?

I know it,—I have seen and hate it,—ay,
 As you shall, while I tell you ! Let me talk, 130
 Or leave me, at your pleasure ! talk I must :

What is your visit but my lure to talk ?
 Nay, you have something to disclose ?—a smile,
 At end of the forced sternness, means to mock
 The heart-beats here ? I call your two hearts
 stone ! 135

Is your charge to stay with me till I die ?
 Be tacit as your bench, then ! Use your ears,
 I use my tongue : how glibly yours will run
 At pleasant supper-time . . . God's curse ! . . .
 to-night

When all the guests jump up, begin so brisk 140
 " Welcome, his Eminence who shrived the wretch !
 " Now we shall have the Abate's story ! "

Life !

How I could spill this overplus of mine
 Among those hoar-haired, shrunk-shanked odds
 and ends 145

Of body and soul old age is chewing dry !
 Those windlestraws that stare while purblind death
 Mows here, mows there, makes hay of juice me,
 And misses just the bunch of withered weed
 Would brighten hell and streak its smoke with
 flame ! 150

How the life I could shed yet never shrink,
 Would drench their stalks with sap like grass in
 May !

Is it not terrible, I entreat you, Sirs ?—
 With manifold and plenitudinous life,
 Prompt at death's menace to give blow for threat, 155
 Answer his " Be thou not ! " by " Thus I am ! "—
 Terrible so to be alive yet die ?

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK XI

How I live, how I see ! so,—how I speak !
 Lucidity of soul unlocks the lips :
 I never had the words at will before. 160
 How I see all my folly at a glance !
 “ A man requires a woman and a wife ” :
 There was my folly ; I believed the saw.
 I knew that just myself concerned myself,
 Yet needs must look for what I seemed to lack, 165
 In a woman,—why, the woman 's in the man !
 Fools we are, how we learn things when too late !
 Overmuch life turns round my woman-side :
 The male and female in me, mixed before,
 Settle of a sudden : I 'm my wife outright 170
 In this unmanly appetite for truth,
 This careless courage as to consequence,
 This instantaneous sight through things and
 through,
 This voluble rhetoric, if you please,—'t is she !
 Here you have that Pompilia whom I slew, 175
 Also the folly for which I slew her !

Fool !

And, fool-like, what is it I wander from ?
 What did I say of your sharp iron tooth ?
 Ah,—that I know the hateful thing ! this way. 180
 I chanced to stroll forth, many a good year gone,
 One warm Spring eve in Rome, and unaware
 Looking, mayhap, to count what stars were out,
 Came on your fine axe in a frame, that falls
 And so cuts off a man's head underneath, 185
 Mannaia,—thus we made acquaintance first :
 Out of the way, in a by-part o' the town,
 At the Mouth-of-Truth o' the river-side, you know:
 One goes by the Capitol : and wherefore coy,
 Retiring out of crowded noisy Rome ? 190
 Because a very little time ago
 It had done service, chopped off head from trunk

Belonging to a fellow whose poor house
The thing must make a point to stand before—
Felice Whatsoever-was-the-name 195
Who stabled buffaloes and so gained bread,
(Our clowns unyoke them in the ground hard by)
And, after use of much improper speech,
Had struck at Duke Some-title-or-other's face,
Because he kidnapped, carried away and kept 200
Felice's sister who would sit and sing
I' the filthy doorway while she plaited fringe
To deck the brutes with,—on their gear it goes,—
The good girl with the velvet in her voice.
So did the Duke, so did Felice, so 205
Did Justice, intervening with her axe.
There the man-mutilating engine stood
At ease, both gay and grim, like a Swiss guard
Off duty, —purified itself as well,
Getting dry, sweet and proper for next week,— 21
And doing incidental good, 't was hoped,
To the rough lesson-lacking populace
Who now and then, forsooth, must right their
wrongs!
There stood the twelve-foot-square of scaffold,
railed
Considerately round to elbow-height, 215
For fear an officer should tumble thence
And sprain his ankle and be lame a month
Through starting when the axe fell and head too!
Railed likewise were the steps whereby 't was
reached.
All of it painted red : red, in the midst, 220
Ran up two narrow tall beams barred across,
Since from the summit, some twelve feet to reach,
The iron plate with the sharp shearing edge
Had slammed, jerked, shot, slid, —I shall soon
find which !—

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK XI

And so lay quiet, fast in its fit place, 225
 The wooden half-moon collar, now eclipsed
 By the blade which blocked its curvature : apart,
 The other half,—the under half-moon board
 Which, helped by this, completes a neck's embrace,—

Joined to a sort of desk that wheels aside 230
 Out of the way when done with,—down you kneel,
 In you 're pushed, over you the other drops,
 Tight you 're clipped, whiz, there 's the blade
 cleaves its best,

Out trundles body, down flops head on floor,
 And where 's your soul gone? That, too, I shall
 find ! 235

This kneeling-place was red, red, never fear !
 But only slimy-like with paint, not blood,
 For why? a decent pitcher stood at hand,
 A broad dish to hold sawdust, and a broom
 By some unnamed utensil,—scraper-rake,— 240
 Each with a conscious air of duty done.
 Underneath, loungers,—boys and some few
 men,—

Discoursed this platter, named the other tool,
 Just as, when grooms tie up and dress a steed,
 Boys lounge and look on, and elucubrate 245
 Whattheround brushisused for, what the square,—
 So was explained—to me the skill-less then—
 The manner of the grooming for next world
 Undergone by Felice What's-his-name.

There 's no such lovely month in Rome as May— 250
 May's crescent is no half-moon of red plank,
 And came now tilting o'er the wave i' the west,
 One greenish-golden sea, right 'twixt those bars
 Of the engine—I began acquaintance with,
 Understood, hated, hurried from before, 255
 To have it out of sight and cleanse my soul !

Here it is all again, conserved for use :
Twelve hours hence, I may know more, not hate
worse.

That young May-moon-month ! Devils of the
deep !

Was not a Pope then Pope as much as now ? 260
Used not he chirrup o'er the Merry Tales,
Chuckle,—his nephew so exact the wag
To play a jealous cullion such a trick
As wins the wife i' the pleasant story ! Well ?
Why do things change ? Wherefore is Rome un-
Romed ? 265

I tell you, ere Felice's corpse was cold,
The Duke, that night, threw wide his palace-doors,
Received the compliments o' the quality
For justice done him,—bowed and smirked his best,
And in return passed round a pretty thing, 270
A portrait of Felice's sister's self,
Florid old rogue Alhano's masterpiece,
As—better than virginity in rags—
Bouncing Europa on the back o' the bull :
They laughed and took their road the safer home. 275
Ah, but times change, there 's quite another Pope,
I do the Duke's deed, take Felice's place,
And, being no Felice, lout and clout,
Stomach but ill the phrase “ I lose my head ! ”
How euphemistic ! Lose what ? Lose your ring, 280
Your snuff-box, tablets, kerchief !—but, your head ?
I learnt the process at an early age ;
'T was useful knowledge, in those same old days,
To know the way a head is set on neck.
My fencing-master urged “ Would you excel ? 285
“ Rest not content with mere bold give-and-guard,
“ Nor pink the antagonist somehow-anyhow !
“ See me dissect a little, and know your game !

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK XI

"Only anatomy makes a thrust the thing."
 Oh Cardinal, those lithe live necks of ours ! 290
 Here go the vertebræ, here 's *Atlas*, here
Aris, and here the symphyses stop short,
 So wisely and well,—as, o'er a corpse, we cant,—
 And here 's the silver cord which . . . what 's our
 word ?
 Depends from the gold bowl, which loosed (not
 "lost ") 295
 Lets us from heaven to hell,—one chop, we 're
 loose !
 "And not much pain i' the process," quoth a sage :
 Who told him ? Not Felice's ghost, I think !
 Such "loosing" is scarce Mother Nature's mode.
 She fain would have cord ease itself away, 300
 Worn to a thread by threescore years and ten,
 Snap while we slumber : that seems bearable.
 I 'm told one clot of blood extravasate
 Ends one as certainly as Roland's sword,—
 Onedrop of lymph suffused proves Oliver's mace,— 305
 Intruding, either of the pleasant pair,
 On the arachnoid tunic of my brain.
 That 's Nature's way of loosing cord !—but Art,
 How of Art's process with the engine here,
 When bowl and cord alike are crushed across, 310
 Bored between, bruised through ? Why, if Fagon's
 self,
 The French Court's pride, that famed practitioner,
 Would pass his cold pale lightning of a knife,
 Pistoja-ware, adroit 'twixt joint and joint,
 With just a "See how facile, gentlefolk !" — 315
 The thing were not so bad to bear ! Brute force
 Cuts as he comes, breaks in, breaks on, breaks out
 O' the hard and soft of you : is that the same ?
 A lithe snake thrids the hedge, makes throb no
 leaf :

A heavy ox sets chest to brier and branch, 320
 Bursts somehow through, and leaves one hideous
 hole
 Behind him !

And why, why must this needs be ?
 Oh, if men were but good ! They are not good,
 Nowise like Peter : people called him rough, 325
 But if, as I left Rome, I spoke the Saint,
 —“ *Petrus, quo vadis ?* ”—doubtless, I should hear,
 “ To free the prisoner and forgive his fault !
 “ I plucked the absolute dead from God’s own bar,
 “ And raised up Dorcas,—why not rescue thee ? ” 330
 What would cost one such nullifying word ?
 If Innocent succeeds to Peter’s place,
 Let him think Peter’s thought, speak Peter’s
 speech !

I say, he is bound to it : friends, how say you ?
 Concede I be all one bloodguiltiness 335
 And mystery of murder in the flesh,
 Why should that fact keep the Pope’s mouth shut
 fast ?

He execrates my crime,—good !—sees hell yawn
 One inch from the red plank’s end which I press,—
 Nothing is better ! What ’s the consequence ? 340
 How should a Pope proceed that knows his cue ?
 Why, leave me linger out my minute here,
 Since close on death comes judgment and comes
 doom,

Not crib at dawn its pittance from a sheep
 Destined ere dewfall to be butcher’s-meat ! 345
 Think, Sirs, if I have done you any harm,
 And you require the natural revenge,
 Suppose, and so intend to poison me,
 —Just as you take and slip into my draught
 The paperful of powder that clears scores, 350

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK XI

You notice on my brow a certain blue :
 How you both overset the wine at once !
 How you both smile ! "Our enemy has the plague !
 "Twelve hours hence he 'll be scraping his bones
 bare
 "Of that intolerable flesh, and die, 355
 "Frenzied with pain : no need for poison here !
 "Step aside and enjoy the spectacle !"
 Tender for souls are you, Pope Innocent !
 Christ's maxim is—one soul outweighs the world :
 Respite me, save a soul, then, curse the world ! 360
 "No," venerable sire, I hear you smirk,
 "No : for Christ's gospel changes names, not
 things,
 "Renews the obsolete, does nothing more !
 "Our fire-new gospel is re-tinkered law,
 "Our mercy, justice,—Jove's rechristened God,— 365
 "Nay, whereas, in the popular conceit,
 "'T is pity that old harsh Law somehow limps,
 "Lingers on earth, although Law's day be done,
 "Else would benignant Gospel interpose,
 "Not furtively as now, but bold and frank 370
 "O'erflutter us with healing in her wings,
 "Law being harshness, Gospel only love—
 "We tell the people, on the contrary,
 "Gospel takes up the rod which Law lets fall ;
 "Mercy is vigilant when justice sleeps ! 375
 "Does Law permit a taste of Gospel-grace ?
 "The secular arm allow the spiritual power
 "To act for once?—no compliment so fine
 "As that our Gospel handsomely turn harsh,
 "Thrust victim back on Law the nice and coy !" 380
 Yes, you do say so, else you would forgive
 Me whom Law does not touch but tosses you !
 Don't think to put on the professional face !
 You know what I know : casuists as you are,

Each nerve must creep, each hair start, sting and
stand, 385

At such illogical inconsequence !

Dear my friends, do but see ! A murder 's tried,
There are two parties to the cause : I 'm one,
—Defend myself, as somebody must do :

I have the best o' the battle : that 's a fact, 390
Simple fact,—fancies find no place just now.

What though half Rome condemned me ? Half
approved :

And, none disputes, the luck is mine at last,
All Rome, i' the main, acquitting me : whereon,
What has the Pope to ask but "How finds Law?" 395

"I find," replies Law, "I have erred this while :

"Guilty or guiltless, Guido proves a priest,

"No layman : he is therefore yours, not mine :

"I bound him : loose him, you whose will is
Christ's !"

And now what does this Vicar of our Lord, 400
Shepherd o' the flock,—one of whose charge bleats
sore

For crook's help from the quag wherein it drowns?

Law suffers him employ the crumpled end :

His pleasure is to turn staff, use the point,

And thrust the shuddering sheep, he calls a wolf, 405

Back and back, down and down to where hell
gapes !

"Guiltless," cries Law—"Guilty" corrects the
Pope !

"Guilty," for the whim's sake ! "Guilty," he
somehow thinks,

And anyhow says : 't is truth ; he dares not lie !

Others should do the lying. That 's the cause 410
Brings you both here : I ought in decency
Confess to you that I deserve my fate,

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK XI

Am guilty, as the Pope thinks,—ay, to the end,
 Keep up the jest, lie on, lie ever, lie
 I' the latest gasp of me ! What reason, Sirs ? 415
 Because to-morrow will succeed to-day
 For you, though not for me : and if I stick
 Still to the truth, declare with my last breath,
 I die an innocent and murdered man,—
 Why, there 's the tongue of Rome will wag apace 420
 This time to-morrow : don't I hear the talk !
 " So, to the last he proved impenitent ?
 " Pagans have said as much of martyred saints !
 " Law demurred, washed her hands of the whole
 case.
 " Prince Somebody said this, Duke Something,
 that. 425
 " Doubtless the man 's dead, dead enough, don't
 fear !
 " But, hang it, what if there have been a spice,
 " A touch of . . . eh ? You see, the Pope 's so
 old,
 " Some of us add, obtuse : age never slips
 " The chance of shoving youth to face death first ! " 430
 And so on. Therefore to suppress such talk
 You two come here, entreat I tell you lies,
 And end, the edifying way. I end,
 Telling the truth ! Your self-styled shepherd
 thieves !
 A thief—and how thieves hate the wolves we
 know : 435
 Damage to theft, damage to thrift, all 's one !
 The red hand is sworn foe of the black jaw.
 That 's only natural, that 's right enough :
 But why the wolf should compliment the thief
 With shepherd's title, bark out life in thanks, 440
 And, spiteless, lick the prong that spits him,—
 eh,

Cardinal? My Abate, scarcely thus!
 There, let my sheepskin-garb, a curse on 't, go—
 Leave my teeth free if I must show my shag!
 Repent? What good shall follow? If I pass 445
 Twelve hours repenting, will that fact hold fast
 The thirteenth at the horrid dozen's end?
 If I fall forthwith at your feet, gnash, tear,
 Foam, rave, to give your story the due grace,
 Will that assist the engine half-way back 450
 Into its hiding-house?—boards, shaking now,
 Bone against bone, like some old skeleton bat
 That wants, at winter's end, to wake and prey!
 Will howling put the spectre back to sleep?
 Ah, but I misconceive your object, Sirs! 455
 Since I want new life like the creature,—life,
 Being done with here, begins i' the world away:
 I shall next have "Come, mortals, and be judged!"
 There 's but a minute betwixt this and then:
 So, quick, be sorry since it saves my soul! 460
 Sirs, truth shall save it, since no lies assist!
 Hear the truth, you, whatever you style yourselves,
 Civilization and society!
 Come, one good grapple, I with all the world!
 Dying in cold blood is the desperate thing; 465
 The angry heart explodes, bears off in blaze
 The indignant soul, and I 'm combustion-ripe.
 Why, you intend to do your worst with me!
 That 's in your eyes! You dare no more than
 death,
 And mean no less. I must make up my mind. 470
 So Pietro,—when I chased him here and there,
 Morsel by morsel cut away the life
 I loathed,—cried for just respite to confess
 And save his soul: much respite did I grant!
 Why grant me respite who deserve my doom? 475
 Me—who engaged to play a prize, fight you,

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK XI

Knowing your arms, and foil you, trick for trick,
 At rapier-fence, your match and, maybe, more.
 I knew that if I chose sin certain sins,
 Solace my lusts out of the regular way 480
 Prescribed me, I should find you in the path,
 Have to try skill with a redoubted foe ;
 You would lunge, I would parry, and make end.
 At last, occasion of a murder comes :
 We cross blades, I, for all my brag, break guard, 485
 And in goes the cold iron at my breast,
 Out at my back, and end is made of me.
 You stand confessed the adroiter swordsman,
 —ay,
 But on your triumph you increase, it seems,
 Want more of me than lying flat on face : 490
 I ought to raise my ruined head, allege
 Not simply I pushed worse blade o' the pair,
 But my antagonist dispensed with steel !
 There was no passage of arms, you looked me
 low,
 With brow and eye abolished cut and thrust 495
 Nor used the vulgar weapon ! This chance
 scratch,
 This incidental hurt, this sort of hole
 I' the heart of me ? I stumbled, got it so !
 Fell on my own sword as a bungler may !
 Yourself proscribe such heathen tools, and trust 500
 To the naked virtue : it was virtue stood
 Unarmed and awed me,—on my brow there
 burned
 Crime out so plainly intolerably red,
 That I was fain to cry—"Down to the dust
 "With me, and bury there brow, brand and all !" 505
 Law had essayed the adventure,—but what's Law ?
 Morality exposed the Gorgon shield !
 Morality and Religion conquer me.

If Law sufficed would you come here, entreat
I supplement law, and confess forsooth? 510
Did not the Trial show things plain enough?
“Ah, but a word of the man’s very self
“Would somehow put the keystone in its place
“And crown the arch!” Then take the word
you want!

I say that, long ago, when things began, 515
All the world made agreement, such and such
Were pleasure-giving profit-bearing acts,
But henceforth extra-legal, nor to be :
You must not kill the man whose death would
please
And profit you, unless his life stop yours 520
Plainly, and needed so be put aside :
Get the thing by a public course, by law,
Only no private bloodshed as of old !
All of us, for the good of every one,
Renounced such licence and conformed to law : 525
Who breaks law, breaks pact therefore, helps
himself

To pleasure and profit over and above the due,
And must pay forfeit, pain beyond his share :
For, pleasure being the sole good in the world,
Anyone’s pleasure turns to someone’s pain, 530
So, law must watch for everyone,—say we,
Who call things wicked that give too much joy,
And nickname mere reprisal, envy makes,
Punishment : quite right ! thus the world goes
round.

I, being well aware such pact there was, 535
I, in my time who found advantage come
Of law’s observance and crime’s penalty,—
Who, but for wholesome fear law bred in friends,
Had doubtless given example long ago,

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK XI

Furnished forth some friend's pleasure with my
 pain, 540
 And, by my death, pieced out his scanty life,—
 I could not, for that foolish life of me,
 Help risking law's infringement,—I broke bond,
 And needs must pay price,—wherefore, here 's
 my head,
 Flung with a flourish ! But, repentance too ? 545
 But pure and simple sorrow for law's breach
 Rather than blunderer's-ineptitude ?
 Cardinal, no ! Abate, scarcely thus !
 'T is the fault, not that I dared try a fall
 With Law and straightway am found undermost, 550
 But that I failed to see, above man's law,
 God's precept you, the Christians, recognize ?
 Colly my cow ! Don't fidget, Cardinal !
 Abate, cross your breast and count your beads
 And exorcize the devil, for here he stands 555
 And stiffens in the bristly nape of neck,
 Daring you drive him hence ! You, Christians
 both ?
 I say, if ever was such faith at all
 Born in the world, by your community
 Suffered to live its little tick of time, 560
 'T is dead of age, now, ludicrously dead ;
 Honour its ashes, if you be discreet,
 In epitaph only ! For, concede its death,
 Allow extinction, you may boast unchecked
 What feats the thing did in a crazy land 565
 At a fabulous epoch,—treat your faith, that way,
 Just as you treat your relics : “ Here 's a shred
 “ Of saintly flesh, a scrap of blessed bone,
 “ Raised King Cophetua, who was dead, to life
 “ In Mesopotamy twelve centuries since, 570
 “ Such was its virtue ! ”—twangs the Sacristan,
 Holding the shrine-box up, with hands like feet

Because of gout in every finger joint :
 Does he bethink him to reduce one knob,
 Allay one twinge by touching what he vaunts ? 575
 I think he half uncrooks fist to catch fee,
 But, for the grace, the quality of cure, -
 Cophetua was the man put that to proof !
 Not otherwise, your faith is shrined and shown
 And shamed at once : you banter while you bow ! 580
 Do you dispute this ? Come, a monster-laugh,
 A madman's laugh, allowed his Carnival
 Later ten days than when all Rome, but he,
 Laughed at the candle-contest : mine 's alight,
 'T is just it sputter till the puff o' the Pope 585
 End it to-morrow and the world turn Ash.
 Come, thus I wave a wand and bring to pass
 In a moment, in the twinkle of an eye,
 What but that —feigning everywhere grows fact,
 Professors turn possessors, realize 590
 The faith they play with as a fancy now,
 And bid it operate, have full effect
 On every circumstance of life, to-day,
 In Rome,— faith's flow set free at fountain-head !
 Now, you 'll own, at this present, when I speak, 595
 Before I work the wonder, there 's no man,
 Woman or child in Rome, faith's fountain-head,
 But might, if each were minded, realize
 Conversely unbelief, faith's opposite—
 Set it to work on life unflinchingly, 600
 Yet give no symptom of an outward change :
 Why should things change because men disbelieve
 What 's incompatible, in the whited tomb,
 With bones and rottenness one inch below ?
 What saintly act is done in Rome to-day 605
 But might be prompted by the devil,—“is”
 I say not,—“has been, and again may be,”—
 I do say, full i' the face o' the crucifix

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK XI

You try to stop my mouth with ! Off with it !
 Look in your own heart, if your soul have eyes ! 610
 You shall see reason why, though faith were fled,
 Unbelief still might work the wires and move
 Man, the machine, to play a faithful part.
 Preside your college, Cardinal, in your cape,
 Or,—having got above his head, grown Pope,— 615
 Abate, gird your loins and wash my feet !
 Do you suppose I am at loss at all
 Why you crook, why you cringe, why fast or feast?
 Praise, blame, sit, stand, lie or go !—all of it,
 In each of you, purest unbelief may prompt, 620
 And wit explain to who has eyes to see.
 But, lo, I wave wand, made the false the true !
 Here 's Rome believes in Christianity !
 What an explosion, how the fragments fly
 Of what was surface, mask and make-believe ! 625
 Begin now,—look at this Pope's-halberdier
 In wasp-like black and yellow foolery !
 He, doing duty at the corridor,
 Wakes from a muse and stands convinced of sin !
 Down he flings halbert, leaps the passage-length, 630
 Pushes into the presence, pantingly
 Submits the extreme peril of the case
 To the Pope's self,—whom in the world beside ?—
 And the Pope breaks talk with ambassador,
 Bids aside bishop, wills the whole world wait 635
 Till he secure that prize, outweighs the world,
 A soul, relieve the sentry of his qualm !
 His Altitude the Referendary,—
 Robed right, and ready for the usher's word
 To pay devoir,—is, of all times, just then 640
 'Ware of a master-stroke of argument
 Will cut the spinal cord . . . ugh, ugh ! . . . I
 mean,
 Paralyse Molinism for evermore !

Straight he leaves lobby, trundles, two and two,
 Down steps to reach home, write, if but a word 645
 Shall end the impudence : he leaves who likes
 Go pacify the Pope : there 's Christ to serve !
 How otherwise would men display their zeal ?
 If the same sentry had the least surmise
 A powder-barrel 'neath the pavement lay 650
 In neighbourhood with what might prove a match,
 Meant to blow sky-high Pope and presence both—
 Would he not break through courtiers, rank and
 file,
 Bundle up, bear off and save body so,
 The Pope, no matter for his priceless soul ? 655
 There 's no fool's-freak here, nought to soundly
 swinge,
 Only a man in earnest, you 'll so praise
 And pay and prate about, that earth shall ring !
 Had thought possessed the Referendary
 His jewel-case at home was left ajar, 660
 What would be wrong in running, robes awry,
 To be beforehand with the pilferer ?
 What talk then of indecent haste ? Which means,
 That both these, each in his degree, would do
 Just that,—for a comparative nothing's sake, 665
 And thereby gain approval and reward,—
 Which, done for what Christ says is worth the
 world,
 Procures the doer curses, cuffs and kicks.
 I call such difference 'twixt act and act,
 Sheer lunacy unless your truth on lip 670
 Be recognized a lie in heart of you !
 How do you all act, promptly or in doubt,
 When there 's a guest poisoned at supper-time
 And he sits chatting on with spot on cheek ?
 “ Pluck him by the skirt, and round him in the ears, 675
 “ Have at him by the beard, waru anyhow ! ”

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK XI

Good, and this other friend that's cheat and thief
 And dissolute,—go stop the devil's feast,
 Withdraw him from the imminent hell-fire!
 Why, for your life, you dare not tell your friend 680
 "You lie, and I admonish you for Christ!"
 Who yet dare seek that same man at the Mass
 To warn him—on his knees, and tinkle near,—
 He left a cask a-tilt, a tap unturned,
 The Trebbian running: what a grateful jump 685
 Out of the Church rewards your vigilance!
 Perform that self-same service just a thought
 More maladroitly,—since a bishop sits
 At function!—and he budes not, bites lip,—
 "You see my case: how can I quit my post? 690
 "He has an eye to any such default.
 "See to it, neighbour, I beseech your love!"
 He and you know the relative worth of things,
 What is permissible or inopportune.
 Contort your brows! You know I speak the truth: 695
 Gold is called gold, and dross called dross, i' the
 Book:
 Gold you let lie and dross pick up and prize!
 —Despite your muster of some fifty monks
 And nuns a-maundering here and mumping there,
 Who could, and on occasion would, spurn dross, 700
 Clutch gold, and prove their faith a fact so far,—
 I grant you! Fifty times the number squeak
 And gibber in the madhouse—firm of faith,
 This fellow, that his nose supports the moon;
 The other, that his straw hat crowns him Pope: 705
 Does that prove all the world outside insane?
 Do fifty miracle-mongers match the mob
 That acts on the frank faithless principle,
 Born-baptized-and-bred Christian-atheists, each
 With just as much a right to judge as you,— 710
 As many senses in his soul, and nerves

I' neck of him as I,—whom, soul and sense,
 Neck and nerve, you abolish presently,—
 I being the unit in creation now
 Who pay the Maker, in this speech of mine, 715
 A creature's duty, spend my last of breath
 In bearing witness, even by my worst fault,
 To the creature's obligation, absolute,
 Perpetual : my worst fault protests, " The faith
 " Claims all of me : I would give all she claims, 720
 " But for a spice of doubt : the risk 's too rash :
 " Double or quits, I play, but, all or nought,
 " Exceeds my courage : therefore, I descend
 " To the next faith with no dubiety—
 " Faith in the present life, made last as long 725
 " And prove as full of pleasure as may hap,
 " Whatever pain it cause the world." I 'm wrong?
 I 've had my life, whate'er I lose : I 'm right ?
 I 've got the single good there was to gain.
 Entire faith, or else complete unbelief ! 730
 Aught between has my loathing and contempt,
 Mine and God's also, doubtless : ask yourself,
 Cardinal, where and how you like a man !
 Why, either with your feet upon his head,
 Confessed your caudatory, or, at large, 735
 The stranger in the crowd who caps to you
 But keeps his distance,—why should he presume ?
 You want no hanger-on and dropper-off,
 Now yours, and now not yours but quite his own,
 According as the sky looks black or bright. 740
 Just so I capped to and kept off from faith—
 You promised trudge behind through fair and foul,
 Yet leave i' the lurch at the first spit of rain.
 Who holds to faith whenever rain begins ?
 What does the father when his son lies dead, 745
 The merchant when his money-bags take wing,
 The politician whom a rival ousts ?

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK XI

No case but has its conduct, faith prescribes :
 Where 's the obedience that shall edify ?
 Why, they laugh frankly in the face of faith 750
 And take the natural course,—this rends his hair
 Because his child is taken to God's breast,
 That gnashes teeth and raves at loss of trash
 Which rust corrupts and thieves break through
 and steal,
 And this, enabled to inherit earth 755
 Through meekness, curses till your blood runs cold!
 Down they all drop to my low level, rest
 Heart upon dungy earth that 's warm and soft,
 And let who please attempt the altitudes.
 Each playing prodigal son of heavenly sire, 760
 Turning his nose up at the fatted calf,
 Fain to fill belly with the husks, we swine
 Did eat by born depravity of taste !

Enough of the hypocrites. But you, Sirs, you—
 Who never budged from litter where I lay, 765
 And buried snout i' the draff-box while I fed,
 Cried amen to my creed's one article—
 “Get pleasure, 'scape pain,—give your preference
 “To the *immédiate* good, for time is brief,
 “And death ends good and ill and everything ! 770
 “What 's got is gained, what 's gained soon is
 gained twice,
 “And,—inasmuch as faith gains most,—feign
 faith !”
 So did we brother-like pass word about :
 —You, now,—like bloody drunkards but half-
 drunk,
 Who fool men yet perceive men find them fools,— 775
 Vexed that a titter gains the gravest mouth,—
 O' the sudden you must needs re-introduce
 Solemnity, straight sober undue mirth

By a blow dealt me your boon companion here
 Who, using the old licence, dreamed of harm 780
 No more than snow in harvest : yet it falls !
 You check the merriment effectually
 By pushing your abrupt machine i' the midst,
 Making me Rome's example : blood for wine !
 The general good needs that you chop and change! 785
 I may dislike the hocus-pocus,—Rome,
 The laughter-loving people, won't they stare
 Chap-fallen !—while serious natures sermonize
 “The magistrate, he beareth not the sword
 “In vain ; who sins may taste its edge, we see !” 790
 Why my sin, drunkards ? Where have I abused
 Liberty, scandalized you all so much ?
 Who called me, who crooked finger till I came,
 Fool that I was, to join companionship ?
 I knew my own mind, meant to live my life, 795
 Elude your envy, or else make a stand,
 Take my own part and sell you my life dear.
 But it was “Fie ! No prejudice in the world
 “To the proper manly instinct ! Cast your lot
 “Into our lap, one genius ruled our births, 800
 “We 'll compass joy by concert ; take with us
 “The regular irregular way i' the wood ;
 “You 'll miss no game through riding breast by
 breast,
 “In this preserve, the Church's park and pale,
 “Rather than outside where the world lies waste !” 805
 Come, if you said not that, did you say this ?
 Give plain and terrible warning, “Live, enjoy ?
 “Such life begins in death and ends in hell !
 “Dare you bid us assist your sins, us priests
 “Who hurry sin and sinners from the earth ? 810
 “No such delight for us, why then for you ?
 “Leave earth, seek heaven or find its opposite !”
 Had you so warned me, not in lying words

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK XI

But veritable deeds with tongues of flame,
 That had been fair, that might have struck a
 man, 815
 Silenced the squabble between soul and sense,
 Compelled him to make mind up, take one course
 Or the other, peradventure !—wrong or right,
 Foolish or wise, you would have been at least
 Sincere, no question,—forced me choose, indulge 820
 Or else renounce my instincts, still play wolf
 Or find my way submissive to your fold,
 Be red-crossed on my fleece, one sheep the more.
 But you as good as bade me wear sheep's wool
 Over wolf's skin, suck blood and hide the noise 825
 By mimicry of something like a bleat,—
 Whence it comes that because, despite my care,
 Because I smack my tongue too loud for once,
 Drop baaing, here 's the village up in arms !
 Have at the wolf's throat, you who hate the breed ! 830
 Oh, were it only open yet to choose—
 One little time more—whether I 'd be free
 Your foe, or subsidized your friend forsooth !
 Should not you get a growl through the white fangs
 In answer to your beckoning ! Cardinal, 835
 Abate, managers o' the multitude,
 I 'd turn your gloved hands to account, be sure !
 You should manipulate the coarse rough mob :
 'T is you I 'd deal directly with, not them,—
 Using your fears : why touch the thing myself 840
 When I could see you hunt, and then cry "Shares !
 "Quarter the carcass or we quarrel ; come,
 "Here 's the world ready to see justice done !"
 Oh, it had been a desperate game, but game
 Wherein the winner's chance were worth the pains ! 845
 We 'd try conclusions !—at the worst, what worse
 Than this Mannaia-machine, each minute's talk
 Helps push an inch the nearer me ? Fool, fool !

You understand me and forgive, sweet Sirs ?
 I blame you, tear my hair and tell my woe— 850
 All 's but a flourish, figure of rhetoric !
 One must try each expedient to save life.
 One makes fools look foolisher fifty-fold
 By putting in their place men wise like you,
 To take the full force of an argument 855
 Would buffet their stolidity in vain.
 If you should feel aggrieved by the mere wind
 O' the blow that means to miss you and maul them,
 That 's my success ! Is it not folly, now,
 To say with folk, " A plausible defence— 860
 " We see through notwithstanding, and reject ? "
 Reject the plausible they do, these fools,
 Who never even make pretence to show
 One point beyond its plausibility
 In favour of the best belief they hold ! 865
 " Saint Somebody-or-other raised the dead " :
 Did he ? How do you come to know as much ?
 " Know it, what need ? ' The story 's plausible,
 " Avouched for by a martyrologist,
 " And why should good mens upon cheese and leeks 870
 " On such a saint's day, if there were no saint ? "
 I praise the wisdom of these fools, and straight
 Tell them my story—" plausible, but false ! "
 False, to be sure ! What else can story be
 That runs—a young wife tired of an old spouse, 875
 Found a priest whom she fled away with,—both
 Took their full pleasure in the two-days' flight,
 Which a grey-headed greyer-hearted pair,
 (Whose best boast was, their life had been a lie)
 Helped for the love they bore all liars. Oh, 880
 Here incredulity begins ! Indeed ?
 Allow then, were no one point strictly true,
 There's that i' the tale might seem like truth at
 least

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK XI

To the unlucky husband,—jaundiced patch—
 Jealousy maddens people, why not him ? 885
 Say, he was maddened, so forgivable !
 Humanity pleads that though the wife were true,
 The priest true, and the pair of liars true,
 They might seem false to one man in the world !
 A thousand gnats make up a serpent's sting, 890
 And many sly soft stimulants to wrath
 Compose a formidable wrong at last
 That gets called easily by some one name
 Not applicable to the single parts,
 And so draws down a general revenge, 895
 Excessive if you take crime, fault by fault.
 Jealousy ! I have known a score of plays,
 Were listened to and laughed at in my time
 As like the everyday-life on all sides,
 Wherein the husband, mad as a March hare, 900
 Suspected all the world contrived his shame.
 What did the wife ? The wife kissed both eyes
 blind,
 Explained away ambiguous circumstance,
 And while she held him captive by the hand,
 Crowned his head,—you know what 's the
 mockery,— 905
 By half her body behind the curtain. That 's
 Nature now ! That 's the subject of a piece
 I saw in Vallombrosa Convent, made
 Expressly to teach men what marriage was !
 But say " Just so did I misapprehend, 910
 " Imagine she deceived me to my face,"
 And that 's pretence too easily seen through !
 All those eyes of all husbands in all plays,
 At stare like one expanded peacock-tail,
 Are laughed at for pretending to be keen 915
 While horn-blind : but the moment I step forth—
 Oh, I must needs o' the sudden prove a lynx

And look the heart, that stone-wall, through and through !

Such an eye, God's may be, —not yours nor mine.

Yes, presently . . . what hour is fleeting now ? 920

When you cut earth away from under me,

I shall be left alone with, pushed beneath

Some such an apparitional dread orb

As the eye of God, since such an eye there glares :

I fancy it go filling up the void

925

Above my mote-self it devours, or what

Proves—wrath, immensity wreaks on nothingness.

Just how I felt once, couching through the dark,

Hard by Vittiano ; young I was, and gay,

And wanting to trap fieldfares : first a spark

930

Tipped a bent, as a mere dew-globule might

Any stiff grass-stalk on the meadow,—this

Grew fiercer, flamed out full, and proved the sun.

What do I want with proverbs, precepts here ?

Away with man ! What shall I say to God ?

935

This, if I find the tongue and keep the mind—

“ Do Thou wipe out the being of me, and smear

“ This soul from off Thy white of things, I blot !

“ I am one huge and sheer mistake,—whose fault ?

“ Not mine at least, who did not make myself ! ” 940

Someone declares my wife excused me so !

Perhaps she knew what argument to use.

Grind your teeth, Cardinal : Abate, writhe !

What else am I to cry out in my rage,

Unable to repent one particle

945

O' the past ? Oh, how I wish some cold wise man

Would dig beneath the surface which you scrape,

Deal with the depths, pronounce on my desert

Groundedly ! I want simple sober sense,

That asks, before it finishes with a dog,

950

Who taught the dog that trick you hang him for ?

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK XI

You both persist to call that act a crime,
Which sense would call . . . yes, I maintain it,
Sirs, . . .

A blunder! At the worst, I stood in doubt
On cross-road, took one path of many paths : 955
It leads to the red thing, we all see now,
But nobody saw at first : one primrose-patch
In bank, one singing-bird in bush, the less,
Had warned me from such wayfare : let me prove!
Put me back to the cross-road, start afresh ! 960
Advise me when I take the first false step !
Give me my wife : how should I use my wife,
Love her or hate her? Prompt my action now !
There she is, there she stands alive and pale,
The thirteen-years'-old child, with milk for blood, 965
Pompilia Comparini, as at first,
Which first is only four brief years ago !
I stand too in the little ground-floor room
O' the father's house at Via Vittoria : see !
Her so-called mother,—one arm round the waist 970
O' the child to keep her from the toys, let fall
At wonder I can live yet look so grim, —
Ushers her in, with deprecating wave
Of the other,—and she fronts me loose at last,
Held only by the mother's finger-tip. 975
Struck dumb,—for she was white enough before!—
She eyes me with those frightened balls of black,
As heifer—the old simile comes pat—
Eyes tremblingly the altar and the priest.
The amazed look, all one insuppressive prayer, — 980
Might she but breathe, set free as heretofore,
Have this cup leave her lips unblistered, bear
Any cross anywhither anyhow,
So but alone, so but apart from me !
You are touched? So am I, quite otherwise, 985
If 't is with pity. I resent my wrong,

Being a man : I only show man's soul
Through man's flesh : she sees mine, it strikes her
thus !

Is that attractive ? To a youth perhaps—
Calf-creature, one-part boy to three-parts girl, 990
To whom it is a flattering novelty

That he, men use to motion from their path,
Can thus impose, thus terrify in turn
A chit whose terror shall be changed apace
To bliss unbearable when grace and glow, 995

Prowess and pride descend the throne and touch
Esther in all that pretty tremble, cured
By the dove o' the sceptre ! But myself am old,
O' the wane at least, in all things : what do you
say

To her who frankly thus confirms my doubt ? 1000

I am past the prime, I scare the woman-world,
Done-with that way : you like this piece of news ?
A little saucy rose-bud minx can strike
Death-damp into the breast of doughty king
Though 't were French Louis,—soul I under-
stand,— 1005

Saying, by gesture of repugnance, just

"Sire, you are regal, puissant and so forth,

"But—young you have been, are not, nor will b. :"

In vain the mother nods, winks, bustles up,
"Count, girls incline to mature worth like you ! 1010

"As for Pompilia, what 's flesh, fish, or fowl

"To one who apprehends no difference,

"And would accept you even were you old

"As you are . . . youngish by her father's side ?

"Trim but your beard a little, thin your bush 1015

"Of eyebrow ; and for presence, portliness,

"And decent gravity, you beat a boy !"

Deceive yourself one minute, if you may,
In presence of the child that so loves age,

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK XI

Whose neck writhes, cords itself against your kiss, 1020
 Whose hand you wring stark, rigid with despair!
 Well, I resent this; I am young in soul,
 Nor old in body,—thews and sinews here,—
 Though the vile surface be not smooth as once,—
 Far beyond that first wheelwork which went wrong 1025
 Through the untempered iron ere 't was proof:
 I am the wrought man worth ten times the crude,
 Would woman see what this declines to see,
 Declines to say "I see,"—the officious word
 That makes the thing, pricks on the soul to shoot 1030
 New fire into the half-used cinder, flesh!
 Therefore 't is she begins with wronging me,
 Who cannot but begin with hating her.
 Our marriage follows: there she stands again!
 Why do I laugh? Why, in the very gripe 1035
 O' the jaws of death's gigantic skull, do I
 Grin back his grin, make sport of my own pangs?
 Why from each clashing of his molars, ground
 To make the devil bread from out my grist,
 Leaps out a spark of mirth, a hellish toy? 1040
 Take notice we are lovers in a church,
 Waiting the sacrament to make us one
 And happy! Just as bid, she bears herself,
 Comes and kneels, rises, speaks, is silent,—goes:
 So have I brought my horse, by word and blow, 1045
 To stand stock-still and front the fire he dreads.
 How can I other than remember this,
 Resent the very obedience? Gain thereby?
 Yes, I do gain my end and have my will,—
 Thanks to whom? When the mother speaks the
 word, 1050
 She obeys it—even to enduring me!
 There had been compensation in revolt—
 Revolt's to quell: but martyrdom rehearsed,
 But predetermined saintship for the sake

O' the mother?—"Go!" thought I, "we meet
again!"

1055

Pass the next weeks of dumb contented death,
She lives,—wakes up, installed in house and home,
Is mine, mine all day-long, all night-long mine.
Good folk begin at me with open mouth

"Now, at least, reconcile the child to life!

1060

"Study and make her love . . . that is, endure

"The . . . hem! the . . . all of you though
somewhat old,

"Till it amount to something, in her eye,

"As good as love, better a thousand times,—

"Since nature helps the woman in such strait,

1065

"Makes passiveness her pleasure: failing which,

"What if you give up boy-and-girl-fools'-play

"And go on to wise friendship all at once?

"Those boys and girls kiss themselves cold, you
know,

"Toy themselves tired and slink aside full soon

1070

"To friendship, as they name satiety:

"Thither go you and wait their coming!" Thanks,
Considerate advisers,—but, fair play!

Had you and I, friends, started fair at first,

We, keeping fair, might reach it, neck by neck,

1075

This blessed goal, whenever fate so please:

But why am I to miss the daisied mile

The course begins with, why obtain the dust

Of the end precisely at the starting-point?

Why quaff life's cup blown free of all the beads,

1080

The bright red froth wherein our beard should
steep

Before our mouth essay the black o' the wine?

Foolish, the love-fit? Let me prove it such

Like you, before like you I puff things clear!

"The best 's to come, no rapture but content!

1085

"Not love's first glory but a sober glow,

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK XI

“Not a spontaneous outburst in pure boon,
 “So much as, gained by patience, care and toil,
 “Proper appreciation and esteem!”

Go preach that to your nephews, not to me 1090
 Who, tired i' the midway of my life, would stop
 And take my first refreshment, pluck a rose :
 What 's this coarse woolly hip, worn smooth of
 leaf,

You counsel I go plant in garden-plot,
 Water with tears, manure with sweat and blood, 1095
 In confidence the seed shall germinate
 And, for its very best, some far-off day,
 Grow big, and blow me out a dog-rose bell?
 Why must your nephews begin breathing spice
 O' the hundred-petalled Provence prodigy? 1100
 Nay, more and worse,—would such my root bear
 rose—

Prove really flower and favourite, not the kind
 That 's queen, but those three leaves that make
 one cup

And hold the hedge-bird's breakfast, — then indeed
 The prize though poor would pay the care and toil! 1105
 Respect we Nature that makes least as most,
 Marvellous in the minim! But this bud,
 Bit through and burned black by the tempter's
 tooth,

This bloom whose best grace was the slug outside
 And the wasp inside its bosom,—call you “rose”? 1110
 Claim no immunity from a weed's fate
 For the horrible present! What you call my wife
 I call a nullity in female shape,
 Vapid disgust, soon to be pungent plague,
 When mixed with, made confusion and a curse 1115
 By two abominable nondescripts,
 That father and that mother : think you see
 The dreadful bronze our boast, we Aretines,

The Etruscan monster, the three-headed thing,
 Bellerophon's foe! How name you the whole
 beast?

1120

You choose to name the body from one head,
 That of the simple kid which droops the eye,
 Hangs the neck and dies tenderly enough :
 I rather see the griesly lion belch

Flame out i' the midst, the serpent writhe her rings, 1125

Grafted into the common stock for tail,
 And name the brute, Chimæra which I slew !

How was there ever more to be— (concede
 My wife's insipid harmless nullity)—

Dissociation from that pair of plagues— 1130

That mother with her cunning and her cant—

The eyes with first their twinkle of conceit,
 Then, dropped to earth in mock-demureness,—
 now,

The smile self-satisfied from ear to ear,
 Now, the prim pursed-up mouth's protruded lips, 1135

With deferential duck, slow swing of head,
 Tempting the sudden fist of man too much,—
 That owl-like screw of lid and rock of ruff !

As for the father,—Cardinal, you know
 The kind of idiot!—such are rife in Rome, 1140

But they wear velvet commonly ; good fools,
 At the end of life, to furnish forth young folk

Who grin and bear with imbecility :

Since the stalled ass, the joker, sheds from jaw
 Corn, in the joke, for those who laugh or starve. 1145

But what say we to the same solemn beast

Wagging his ears and wishful of our pat,
 When turned, with holes in hide and bones laid
 bare,

To forage for himself i' the waste o' the world,
 Sir Dignity i' the dumps? Pat hi :? We drub 1150
 Self-knowledge, rather, into frowzy pate,

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK XI

Teach Pietro to get trappings or go hang !
 Fancy this quondam oracle in vogue
 At Via Vittoria, this personified
 Authority when time was, — Pantaloon 1155
 Flaunting his tom-fool tawdry just the same
 As if Ash-Wednesday were mid-Carnival !
 That 's the extreme and unforgivable
 Of sins, as I account such. Have you stooped
 For your own ends to bestialize yourself 1160
 By flattery of a fellow of this stamp ?
 The ends obtained or else shown out of reach,
 He goes on, takes the flattery for pure truth,—
 “You love, and honour me, of course: what next?”
 What, but the trifle of the stabbing, friend?— 1165
 Which taught you how one worships when the
 shrine
 Has lost the relic that we bent before.
 Angry ! And how could I be otherwise ?
 ‘T is plain : this pair of old pretentious fools
 Meant to fool me : it happens, I fooled them. 1170
 Why could not these who sought to buy and sell
 Me,—when they found themselves were bought
 and sold, .
 Make up their mind to the proved rule of right,
 Be chattel and not chapman any more ?
 Miscalculation has its consequence ; 1175
 But when the shepherd crooks a sheep-like thing
 And meaning to get wool, dislodges fleece
 And finds the veritable wolf beneath,
 (How that staunch image serves at every turn !)
 Does he, by way of being politic, 1180
 Pluck the first whisker grimly visible ?
 Or rather grow in a trice all gratitude,
 Protest this sort-of-what-one-might-name sheep
 Beats the old other curly-coated kind,
 And shall share board and bed, if so it deign, 1185

With its discoverer, like a royal ram ?

Ay, thus, with chattering teeth and knocking
knees,

Would wisdom treat the adventure ! these, for-
sooth,

Tried whisker-plucking, and so found what trap
The whisker kept perdue, two rows of teeth— 1190

Sharp, as too late the prying fingers felt.

What would you have ? The fools transgress,
the fools

Forthwith receive appropriate punishment :

They first insult me, I return the blow,
There follows noise enough : four hubbub months, 1195
Now hue and cry, now whimpering and wail—

A perfect goose-yard cackle of complaint
Because I do not gild the geese their oats,—

I have enough of noise, ope wicket wide,
Sweep out the couple to go whine elsewhere, 1200
Frightened a little, hurt in no respect,

And am just taking thought to breathe again,
Taste the sweet sudden silence all about,
When, there they raise it, the old noise I know,
At Rome i' the distance ! “What, begun once
more ? 1205

“Whine on, wail ever, 't is the loser's right !”

But eh, what sort of voice grows on the wind ?

Triumph it sounds and no complaint at all !

And triumph it is. My boast was premature :

The creatures, I turned forth, clapped wing and
crew 1210

Fighting-cock-fashion,—they had filched a pearl
From dung-heap, and might boast with cause
enough !

I was defrauded of all bargained for :

You know, the Pope knows, not a soul but knows
My dowry was derision, my gain—muck, 1215

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK XI

My wife, (the Church declared my flesh and blood)
 The nameless bastard of a common whore :
 My old name turned henceforth to . . . shall I say
 "He that received the ordure in his face?"
 And they who planned this wrong, performed
 this wrong, 1220
 And then revealed this wrong to the wide world,
 Rounded myself in the ears with my own wrong,—
 Why, these were (note hell's lucky malice, now !)
 These were just they who, they alone, could act
 And publish and proclaim their infamy, 1225
 Secure that men would in a breath believe
 Compassionate and pardon them, - for why?
 They plainly were too stupid to invent,
 Too simple to distinguish wrong from right,—
 Inconscious agents they, the silly-sooth, 1230
 Of heaven's retributive justice on the strong
 Proud cunning violent oppressor—me !
 Follow them to their fate and help your best,
 You Rome, Arezzo, foes called friends of me,
 They gave the good long laugh to, at my cost ! 1235
 Defray your share o' the cost, since you partook
 The entertainment ! Do !—assured the while,
 That not one stab, I dealt to right and left,
 But went the deeper for a fancy—this—
 That each might do me two-fold service, find 1240
 A friend's face at the bottom of each wound,
 And scratch its smirk a little !

Panciatichi !

There 's a report in Florence,—is it true?—
 That when your relative the Cardinal 1245
 Built, only the other day, that barrack-bulk,
 The palace in Via Larga, someone picked
 From out the street a saucy quip enough
 That fell there from its day's flight through the
 town,

About the flat front and the windows wide 1250
 And bulging heap of cornice,—hitched the joke
 Into a sonnet, signed his name thereto,
 And forthwith pinned on post the pleasantry :
 For which he 's at the galleys, rowing now
 Up to his waist in water,—just because 1255
Panciatie and *lymphatic* rhymed so pat !
 I hope, Sir, those who passed this joke on me
 Were not unduly punished ? What say you,
 Prince of the Church, my patron ? Nay, indeed,
 I shall not dare insult your wits so much 1260
 As think this problem difficult to solve.
 This Pietro and Violante then, I say,
 These two ambiguous insects, changing name
 And nature with the season's warmth or chill,—
 Now, grovelled, grubbing toiling moiling ants, 1265
 A very synonym of thrift and peace,—
 Anon, with lusty June to prick their heart,
 Soared i' the air, winged flies for more offence,
 Circled me, buzzed me deaf and stung me blind,
 And stunk me dead with feter in the face 1270
 Until I stopped the nuisance : there 's my crime !
 Pity I did not suffer them subside
 Into some further shape and final form
 Of execrable life ? My masters, no !
 I, by one blow, wisely cut short at once 1275
 Them and their transformations of disgust,
 In the snug little Villa out of hand.
 "Grant me confession, give bare time for that!"—
 Shouted the sinner till his mouth was stopped.
 His life confessed !—that was enough for me, 1280
 Who came to see that he did penance. 'S death !
 Here 's a coil raised, a pother and for what ?
 Because strength, being provoked by weakness,
 fought
 And conquered,—the world never heard the like !

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK XI

Pah, how I spend my breath on them, as if 1285
 'T was their fate troubled me, too hard to range
 Among the right and fit and proper things !

Ay, but Pompilia,—I await your word,—
 She, unimpeached of crime, unimplicate
 In folly, one of alien blood to these 1290
 I punish, why extend my claim, exact
 Her portion of the penalty? Yes, friends,
 I go too fast : the orator 's at fault :
 Yes, ere I lay her, with your leave, by them
 As she was laid at San Lorenzo late, 1295
 I ought to step back, lead you by degrees,
 Recounting at each step some fresh offence,
 Up to the red bed,—never fear, I will !
 Gaze at her, where I place her, to begin,
 Confound me with her gentleness and worth ! 1300
 The horrible pair have fled and left her now,
 She has her husband for her sole concern :
 His wife, the woman fashioned for his help,
 Flesh of his flesh, bone of his bone, the bride
 To groom as is the Church and Spouse to Christ : 1305
 There she stands in his presence : “ Thy desire
 “ Shall be to the husband, o'er thee shall he rule ! ”
 —“ Pompilia, who declare that you love God,
 “ You know who said that : then, desire my love,
 “ Yield me contentment and be ruled aright ! ” 1310
 She sits up, she lies down, she comes and goes,
 Kneels at the couch-side, overleans the sill
 O' the window, cold and pale and mute as stone,
 Strong as stone also. “ Well, are they not fled ?
 “ Am I not left, am I not one for all ? ” 1315
 “ Speak a word, drop a tear, detach a glance,
 “ Bless me or curse me of your own accord !
 “ Is it the ceiling only wants your soul,
 “ Is worth your eyes ? ” And then the eyes descend,

And do look at me. Is it at the meal ? 1320
 "Speak!" she obeys, "Be silent!" she obeys,
 Counting the minutes till I cry "Depart,"
 As brood-bird when you saunter past her eggs.
 Departs she? just the same through door and wall
 I see the same stone strength of white despair. 1325
 And all this will be never otherwise!
 Before, the parents' presence lent her life:
 She could play off her sex's armoury,
 Entreat, reproach, be female to my male,
 Try all the shrieking doubles of the hare, 1330
 Go clamour to the Commissary, bid
 The Archbishop hold my hands and stop my
 tongue,
 And yield fair sport so: but the tactics change,
 The hare stands stock-still to enrage the hound!
 Since that day when she learned she was no child 1335
 Of those she thought her parents,—that their trick
 Had tricked me whom she thought sole trickster
 late,—
 Why, I suppose she said within herself
 "Then, no more struggle for my parents' sake!
 "And, for my own sake, why needs struggle be?" 1340
 But is there no third party to the pact?
 What of her husband's relish or dislike
 For this new game of giving up the game,
 This worst offence of not offending more?
 I'll not believe but instinct wrought in this, 1345
 Set her on to conceive and execute
 The preferable plague: how sure they probe—
 These jades, the sensitivest soft of man!
 The long black hair was wound now in a wisp.
 Crowned sorrow better than the wild web late: 1350
 No more soiled dress, 't is trimness 'triumphs now,
 For how should malice go with negligence?
 The frayed silk looked the fresher for her spite!

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK XI

There was an end to springing out of bed,
 Praying me, with face buried on my feet, 1355
 Be hindered of my pastime,—so an end
 To my rejoinder, “What, on the ground at last?
 “Vanquished in fight, a supplicant for life?
 “What if I raise you? ’Ware the casting down
 “When next you fight me!” Then, she lay
 there, mine : 1360

Now, mine she is if I please wring her neck,—
 A moment of disquiet, working eyes,
 Protruding tongue, a long sigh, then no more, —
 As if one killed the horse one could not ride !
 Had I enjoined “Cut off the hair !”—why, snap 1365
 The scissors, and at once a yard or so
 Had fluttered in black serpents to the floor :
 But till I did enjoin it, how she combs,
 Uncurls and draws out to the complete length,
 Plaits, places the insulting rope on head 1370
 To be an eyesore past dishevelment !
 Is all done? Then sit still again and stare !
 I advise—no one think to bear that look”
 Of steady wrong, endured as steadily
 —Through what sustainment of deluding hope? 1375
 Who is the friend i’ the background that notes all?
 Who may come presently and close accounts?
 This self-possession to the uttermost,
 How does it differ in aught, save degree,
 From the terrible patience of God? 1380

“All which just means,
 “She did not love you!” Again the word is
 launched

And the fact fronts me ! What, you try the wards
 With the true key and the dead lock flies ope?
 No, it sticks fast and leaves you fumbling still ! 1385
 You have some fifty servants, Cardinal,—
 Which of them loves you? Which subordinate

But makes parade of such officiousness
That,—if there 's no love prompts it,—love, the
sham,

Does twice the service done by love, the true? 1390

God bless us liars, where 's one touch of truth

In what we tell the world, or world tells us,

Of how we love each other? All the same,

We calculate on word and deed, nor err,—

Bid such a man do such a loving act, 1395

Sure of effect and negligent of cause,

Just as we bid a horse, with cluck of tongue,

Stretch his legs arch-wise, crouch his saddled back

To foot-reach of the stirrup—all for love,

And some for memory of the smart of switch 1400

On the inside of the foreleg—what care we?

Yet where 's the bond obliges horse to man

Like that which binds fast wife to husband? God

Laid down the law : gave man the brawny arm

And ball of fist—woman the beardless cheek 1405

And proper place to suffer in the side :

Since it is he can strike, let her obey!

Can she feel no love? Let her show the more,

Sham the worse, damn herself praiseworthy!

Who 's that soprano, Rome went mad about 1410

Last week while I lay rotting in my straw?

The very jailer gossiped in his praise—

How,—dressed up like Armida, though a man;

And painted to look pretty, though a fright,—

He still made love so that the ladies swooned, 1415

Being an eunuch. “Ah, Rinaldo mine!

“But to breathe by thee while Jove slays us both!”

All the poor bloodless creature never felt,

Si, do, re, mi, fa, squeak and squall—for what?

Two gold zecchines the evening. Here 's my
slave, 1420

Whose body and soul depend upon my nod,

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK XI

Can't falter out the first note in the scale
 For her life ! Why blame me if I take the life ?
 All women cannot give men love, forsooth !
 No, nor all pullets lay the henwife eggs— 1425
 Whereat she bids them remedy the fault,
 Brood on a chalk-ball : soon the nest is stocked—
 Otherwise, to the plucking and the spit !
 This wife of mine was of another mood—
 Would not begin the lie that ends with truth, 1430
 Nor feign the love that brings real love about :
 Wherefore I judged, sentenced and punished her.
 But why particularize, defend the deed ?
 Say that I hated her for no one cause
 Beyond my pleasure so to do,—what then ? 1435
 Just on as much incitement acts the world,
 All of you ! Look and like ! You favour one,
 Browbeat another, leave alone a third,—
 Why should you master natural caprice ?
 Pure nature ! Try : plant elm by ash in file ; 1440
 Both unexceptionable trees enough,
 They ought to overlean each other, pair —
 At top, and arch across the avenue
 The whole path to the pleasaunce : do they so—
 Or loathe, lie off abhorrent each from each ? 1445
 Lay the fault elsewhere : since we must have faults,
 Mine shall have been,—seeing there 's ill in the end
 Come of my course,—that I fare somehow worse
 For the way I took : my fault . . . as God 's my
 judge,
 I see not where my fault lies, that 's the truth ! 1450
 I ought . . . oh, ought in my own interest
 Have let the whole adventure go untried,
 This chance by marriage : or else, trying it,
 Ought to have turned it to account, some one
 O' the hundred otherwises ? Ay, my friend, 1455
 Easy to say, easy to do : step right

Now you 've stepped left and stumbled on the
thing,

—The red thing ! Doubt I any more than you
That practice makes man perfect ? Give again
The chance,—same marriage and no other wife, 1460
Be sure I 'll edify you ! That 's because
I 'm practised, grown fit guide for Guido's self.
You proffered guidance,—I know, none so well,—
You laid down law and rolled decorum out,
From pulpit-corner on the gospel-side,— 1465
Wanted to make your great experience mine,
Save me the personal search and pains so : thanks !
Take your word on life's use ? When I take his—
The muzzled ox that treadeth out the corn,
Gone blind in padding round and round one
path,— 1470

As to the taste of green grass in the field !
What do you know o' the world that 's trodden flat
And salted sterile with your daily dung,
Leavened into a lump of loathsomeness ?
Take your opinion of the modes of life, 1475
The aims of life, life's triumph or defeat,
How to feel, how to scheme, and how to do
Or else leave undone ? You preached long and
loud

On high-days, "Take our doctrine upon trust !
"Into the mill-house with you ! Grind our corn, 1480
"Relish our chaff, and let the green grass grow !"
I tried chaff, found I famished on such fare,
So made this mad rush at the mill-house-door,
Buried my head up to the ears in dew,
Browsed on the best : for which you brain me, Sirs ! 1485
Be it so. I conceived of life that way,
And still declare—life, without absolute use
Of the actual sweet therein, is death, not life.
Give me,—paydown,—not promise, which is air,—

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK XI

Something that 's out of life and better still, 1490
 Make sure reward, make certain punishment,
 Entice me, scare me,—I 'll forgo this life ;
 Otherwise, no !—the less that words, mere wind,
 Would cheat me of some minutes while they
 plague,

Baulk fulness of revenge here,—blame yourselves 1495
 For this eruption of the pent-up soul

You prisoned first and played with afterward !

“ Deny myself ” meant simply pleasure you,

The sacred and superior, save the mark !

You,—whose stupidity and insolence 1500

I must defer to, soothe at every turn,—

Whose swine-like snuffing greed and grunting lust

I had to wink at or help gratify,—

While the same passions,—dared they perk in me,

Me, the immeasurably marked, by God, 1505

Master of the whole world of such as you,—

I, boast such passions ? 'T was “ Suppress them
 straight !

“ Or stay, we 'll pick and choose before destroy.

“ Here 's wrath in you, a serviceable sword,—

“ Beat it into a ploughshare ! What 's this long 1510

“ Lance-like ambition ? Forge a pruning-hook,

“ May be of service when our vines grow tall !

“ But—sword use swordwise, spear thrust out as
 spear ?

“ Anathema ! Suppression is the word ! ”

My nature, when the outrage was too gross, 1515

Widened itself an outlet over-wide

By way of answer, sought its own relief

With more of fire and brimstone than you wished.

All your own doing : preachers, blame yourselves !

'T is I preach while the hour-glass runs and runs ! 1520

God keep me patient ! All I say just means—

My wife proved, whether by her fault or mine,—
 That 's immaterial, — a true stumbling-block
 I' the way of me her husband. I but plied
 The hatchet yourselves use to clear a path, 1525
 Was politic, played the game you warrant wins,
 Plucked at law's robe a-rustle through the courts,
 Bowed down to kiss divinity's buckled shoe
 Cushioned i' the church : efforts all wide the aim !
 Procedures to no purpose ! Then flashed truth. 1530
 The letter kills, the spirit keeps alive
 In law and gospel : there be nods and winks
 Instruct a wise man to assist himself
 In certain matters, nor seek aid at all.
 "Ask money of me,"—quoth the clownish saw,— 1535
 "And take my purse ! But,—speaking with
 respect, —
 "Need you a solace for the troubled nose ?
 "Let everybody wipe his own himself !"
 Sirs, tell me free and fair ! Had things gone well
 At the wayside inn : had I surprised asleep 1540
 The runaways, as was so probable,
 And pinned them each to other partridge-wise,
 Through back and breast to breast and back,
 then bade
 Bystanders witness if the spit, my sword,
 Were loaded with unlawful game for once— 1545
 Would you have interposed to damp the glow
 Applauding me on every husband's cheek ?
 Would you have checked the cry "A judg-
 ment, see !
 "A warning, note ! Be henceforth chaste, ye
 wives,
 "Nor stray beyond your proper precinct, priests !" 1550
 If you had, then your house against itself
 Divides, nor stands your kingdom any more.
 Oh why, why was it not ordained just so ?

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK XI

Why fell not things out so nor otherwise?
 Ask that particular devil whose task it is 1555
 To trip the all-but-at perfection,—slur
 The line of the painter just where paint leaves off
 And life begins,—put ice into the ode
 O' the poet while he cries "Next stanza—fire!"
 Inscribe all human effort with one word, 1560
 Artistry's haunting curse, the Incomplete!
 Being incomplete, my act escaped success.
 Easy to blame now! Every fool can swear
 To hole in net that held and slipped the fish.
 But, treat my act with fair unjaundiced eye, 1565
 What was there wanting to a masterpiece
 Except the luck that lies beyond a man?
 My way with the woman, now proved grossly
 wrong,
 Just missed of being gravely grandly right
 And making mouths laugh on the other side. 157
 Do, for the poor obstructed artist's sake,
 Go with him over that spoiled work once more!
 Take only its first flower, the ended act
 Now in the dusty pod, dry and defunct!
 I march to the Villa, and my men with me, 1575
 That evening, and we reach the door and stand.
 I say . . . no, it shoots through me lightning-like
 While I pause, breathe, my hand upon the latch,
 "Let me forebode! Thus far, too much success:
 "I want the natural failure—find it where? 1580
 "Which thread will have to break and leave a loop
 "I' the meshy combination, my brain's loom
 "Wove this long while, and now next minute
 tests?
 "Of three that are to catch, two should go free,
 "One must: all three surprised,—impossible! 1585
 "Beside, I seek three and may chance on six,—
 "This neighbour, t'other gossip,—the babe's birth

"Brings such to fireside, and folks give them
wine,—

"'T is late : but when I break in presently

"One will be found outlingering the rest 1590

"For promise of a posset,—one whose shout

"Would raise the dead down in the catacombs,

"Much more the city-watch that goes its round.

"When did I ever turn adroitly up

"To sun some brick embedded in the soil, 1595

"And with one blow crush all three scorpions
there?

"Or Pietro or Violante shambles off—

"It cannot be but I surprise my wife—

"If only she is stopped and stamped on, good!

"That shall suffice : more is improbable. 1600

"Now I may knock!" And this once for my sake

The impossible was effected : I called king,

Queen and knave in a sequence, and cards came,

All three, three only! So, I had my way,

Did my deed : so, unbrokenly lay bare 1605

Each tania that had sucked me dry of juice,

At last outside me, not an inch of ring

Left now to writhe about and root itself

I' the heart all powerless for revenge! Hencetoth

I might thrive : these were drawn and dead and
damned. 1610

Oh Cardinal, the deep long sigh you heave

When the load 's off you, ringing as it runs

All the way down the serpent-stair to hell!

No doubt the fine delirium flustered me,

Turned my brain with the influx of success 1615

As if the sole need now were to wave wand

And find doors fly wide, —wish and have my will,—

The rest o' the scheme would care for itself: escape,

Easy enough were that, and poor beside!

It all but proved so,—ought to quite have proved, 1620

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK XI

Since, half the chances had sufficed, set free
 Anyone, with his senses at command,
 From thrice the danger of my flight. But, drunk,
 Redundantly triumphant,—some reverse
 Was sure to follow! There 's no other way 1625
 Accounts for such prompt perfect failure then
 And there on the instant. Any day o' the week,
 A ducat slid discreetly into palm
 O' the mute post-master, while you whisper him—
 How you the Count and certain four your knaves, 1630
 Have just been mauling who was malapert,
 Suspect the kindred may prove troublesome,
 Therefore, want horses in a hurry,—that
 And nothing more secures you any day
 The pick o' the stable! Yet I try the trick, 1635
 Double the bribe, call myself Duke for Count,
 And say the dead man only was a Jew,
 And for my pains find I am dealing just
 With the one scrupulous fellow in all Rome -
 Just this immaculate official stares, 1640
 Sees I want hat on head and sword in sheath,
 Am splashed with other sort of wet than wine,
 Shrugs shoulder, puts my hand by, gold and all,
 Stands on the strictness of the rule o' the road!
 "Where 's the Permission?" Where 's the
 wretched rag 1645
 With the due seal and sign of Rome's Police,
 To be had for asking, half-an-hour ago?
 "Gone? Get another, or no horses hence!"
 He dares not stop me, we five glare too grim,
 But hinders,—hacks and hamstrings sure enough, 1650
 Gives me some twenty miles of miry road
 More to march in the middle of that night
 Whereof the rough beginning taxed the strength
 O' the youngsters, much more mine, both soul
 and flesh,

Who had to think as well as act : dead-beat, 1655
 We gave in ere we reached the boundary
 And safe spot out of this irrational Rome,—
 Where, on dismounting from our steeds next day,
 We had snapped our fingers at you, safe and sound,
 Tuscans once more in blessed Tuscany, 1660
 Where laws make wise allowance, understand
 Civilized life and do its champions right !
 Witness the sentence of the Rota there,
 Arezzo uttered, the Granduke confirmed,
 One week before I acted on its hint,— 1665
 Giving friend Guillichini, for his love,
 The galleys, and my wife your saint, Rome's
 saint, - -

Rome manufactures saints enough to know,—
 Seclusion at the Stinche for her life.
 All this, that all but was, might all have been, 1670
 Yet was not ! baulked by just a scrupulous knave
 Whose palm was horn through handling horses'
 hoofs

And could not close upon my proffered gold !
 What say you to the spite of fortune ? Well,
 The worst 's in store : thus hindered, haled this
 way 1675

To Rome again by hangdogs, whom find I
 Here, still to fight with, but my pale frail wife ?
 —Riddled with wounds by one not like to waste
 The blows he dealt, —knowing anatomy,—
 (I think I told you) bound to pick and choose 1680
 The vital parts ! 'T was learning all in vain !
 She too must shimmer through the gloom o' the
 grave,

Come and confront me -not at judgment-seat
 Where I could twist her soul, as erst her flesh,
 And turn her truth into a lie,—but there, 1685
 O'the death-bed, with God's hand between us both,

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK XI

Striking me dumb, and helping her to speak,
 Tell her own story her own way, and turn
 My plausibility to nothingness !
 Four whole days did Pompilia keep alive, 1690
 With the best surgery of Rome agape
 At the miracle,—this cut, the other slash,
 And yet the life refusing to dislodge,
 Four whole extravagant impossible days,
 Till she had time to finish and persuade 1695
 Every man, every woman, every child
 In Rome, of what she would : the selfsame she
 Who, but a year ago, had wrung her hands,
 Reddened her eyes and beat her breasts, rehearsed
 The whole game at Arezzo, nor availed 1700
 Thereby to move one heart or raise one hand !
 When destiny intends you cards like these,
 What good of skill and preconcerted play ?
 Had she been found dead, as I left her dead,
 I should have told a tale brooked no reply : 1705
 You scarcely will suppose me found at fault
 With that advantage ! “What brings me to Rome?
 “Necessity to claim and take my wife :
 “Better, to claim and take my new-born babe,—
 “Strong in paternity a fortnight old, 1710
 “When 't is at strongest : warily I work,
 “Knowing the machinations of my foe ;
 “I have companionship and use the night :
 “I seek my wife and child,—I find—no child
 “But wife, in the embraces of that priest 1715
 “Who caused her to clope from me. These two,
 “Backed by the pander-pair who watch the while,
 “Spring on me like so many tiger-cats,
 “Glad of the chance to end the intruder. I—
 “What should I do but stand on my defence, 1720
 “Strike right, strike left, strike thick and three-
 fold, slay,

"Not all—because the coward priest escapes.

"Last, I escape, in fear of evil tongues,

"And having had my taste of Roman law."

What 's disputable, refutable here?—

1725

Save by just this one ghost-thing half on earth,

Half out of it,—as if she held God's hand

While she leant back and looked her last at me,

Forgiving me (here monks begin to weep)

Oh, from her very soul, commending mine

1730

To heavenly mercies which are infinite,—

While fixing fast my head beneath your knife!

'T is fate not fortune. All is of a piece!

When was it chance informed me of my youths?

My rustic four o' the family, soft swains,

1735

What sweet surprise had they in store for me,

Those of my very household,—what did Law

Twist with her rack-and-cord-contrivance late

From out their bones and marrow? What but
this—

Had no one of these several stumbling-blocks

1740

Stopped me, they yet were cherishing a scheme,

All of their honest country homespun wit,

To quietly next day at crow of cock

Cut my own throat too, for their own behoof,

Seeing I had forgot to clear accounts

1745

O' the instant, nowise slackened speed for that,—

And somehow never might find memory,

Once safe back in Arczzo, where things change,

And a court-lord needs mind no country lout.

Well, being the arch-offender, I die last,—

1750

May, ere my head falls, have my eyesight free,

Nor miss them dangling high on either hand,

Like scarecrows in a hemp-field, for their pains!

And then my 'Trial,—'t is my Trial that bites

Like a corrosive, so the cards are packed,

1755

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK XI

Dice loaded, and my life-stake tricked away !
 Look at my lawyers, lacked they grace of law,
 Latin or logic ? Were not they fools to the height,
 Fools to the depth, fools to the level between,
 O' the foolishness set to decide the case ? 1760
 They feign, they flatter ; nowise does it skill,
 Everything goes against me : deal each judge
 His dole of flattery and feigning,—why
 He turns and tries and snuffs and savours it,
 As some old fly the sugar-grain, your gift ; 1765
 Then eyes your thumb and finger, brushes clean
 The absurd old head of him, and whisks away,
 Leaving your thumb and finger dirty. Faugh !

And finally, after this long-drawn range
 Of affront and failure, failure and affront,— 1770
 This path, 'twixt crosses leading to a skull,
 Paced by me barefoot, bloodied by my palms
 From the entry to the end,—there 's light at length,
 A cranny of escape : appeal may be
 To the old man, to the father, to the Pope, 1775
 For a little life—from one whose life is spent,
 A little pity—from pity's source and seat,
 A little indulgence to rank, privilege,
 From one who is the thing personified,
 Rank, privilege, indulgence, grown beyond 1780
 Earth's bearing, even, ask Jansenius else !
 Still the same answer, still no other tune
 From the cicala perched at the tree-top
 Than crickets noisy round the root : 't is " Die ! "
 Bids Law—" Be damned ! " adds Gospel,—nay, 1785
 No word so frank,—'t is rather, " Save yourself ! "
 The Pope subjoins—" Confess and be absolved !
 " So shall my credit countervail your shame,
 " And the world see I have not lost the knack
 " Of trying all the spirits : yours, my son, 1790

"Wants but a fiery washing to emerge
 "In clarity! Come, cleanse you, ease the ache
 "Of these old bones, refresh our bowels, boy!"
 Do I mistake your mission from the Pope?
 Then, bear his Holiness the mind of me! 1795
 I do get strength from being thrust to wall,
 Successively wrenched from pillar and from post
 By this tenacious hate of fortune, hate
 Of all things in, under, and above earth.
 Warfare, begun this mean unmanly mode, 1800
 Does best to end so,—gives earth spectacle
 Of a brave fighter who succumbs to odds
 That turn defeat to victory. Stab, I fold
 My mantle round me! Rome approves my act:
 Applauds the blow which costs me life but keeps 1805
 My honour spotless: Rome would praise no more
 Had I fallen, say, some fifteen years ago,
 Helping Vienna when our Aretines
 Flocked to Duke Charles and fought Turk Mustafa;
 Nor would you two be trembling o'er my corpse 1810
 With all this exquisite solicitude.
 Why is it that I make such suit to live?
 The popular sympathy that 's round me now
 Would break like bubble that o'er-domes a fly:
 Solid enough while he lies quiet there, 1815
 But let him want the air and ply the wing,
 Why, it breaks and bespatters him, what else?
 Cardinal, if the Pope had pardoned me,
 And I walked out of prison through the crowd,
 It would not be your arm I should dare press! 1820
 Then, if I got safe to my place again,
 How sad and sapless were the years to come!
 I go my old ways and find things grown grey;
 You priests leer at me, old friends look askance,
 The mob 's in love, I 'll wager, to a man, 1825
 With my poor young good beauteous murdered wife:

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For hearts require instruction how to beat,
 And eyes, on warrant of the story, wax
 Wanton at portraiture in white and black
 Of dead Pompilia gracing ballad-sheet, 1830
 Which eyes, lived she unmurdered and unsung,
 Would never turn though she paced street as bare
 As the mad penitent ladies do in France.
 My brothers quietly would edge me out
 Of use and management of things called mine ; 1835
 Do I command? "You stretched command
 before!"

Show anger? "Anger little helped you once!"
 Advise? "How managed you affairs of old?"
 My very mother, all the while they gird,
 Turns eye up, gives confirmatory groan ; 1840
 For unsucccess, explain it how you will,
 Disqualifies you, makes you doubt yourself,
 —Much more, is found decisive by your friends.
 Beside, am I not fifty years of age?
 What new leap would a life take, checked like
 mine 1845

I' the spring at outset? Where's my second
 chance?

Ay, but the babe . . . I had forgot my son,
 My heir! Now for a burst of gratitude!
 There's some appropriate service to intone,
 Some *gaudeamus* and thanksgiving-psalm! 1850
 Old, I renew my youth in him, and poor
 Possess a treasure,—is not that the phrase?
 Only I must wait patient twenty years—
 Nourishing all the while, as father ought,
 The excrescence with my daily blood of life. 1855
 Does it respond to hope, such sacrifice,—
 Grows the wen plump while I myself grow lean?
 Why, here's my son and heir in evidence,
 Who, stronger, wiser, handsomer than I

By fifty years, relieves me of each load,— 1860
Tames my hot horse, carries my heavy gun,
Courts my coy mistress,—has his apt advice
On house-economy, expenditure,
And what not. All which good gifts and great
growth

Because of my decline, he brings to bear 1865
On Guido, but half apprehensive how
He cumpers earth, crosses the brisk young Count,
Who civilly would thrust him from the scene.

Contrariwise, does the blood-offering fail ?
There 's an ineptitude, one blank the more 1870
Added to earth in semblance of my child ?

Then, this has been a costly piece of work,
My life exchanged for his !—why he, not I,
Enjoy the world, if no more grace accrue ?
Dwarf me, what giant have you made of him ? 1875

I do not dread the disobedient son :
I know how to suppress rebellion there,
Being not quite the fool my father was.
But grant the medium measure of a man,
The usual compromise 'twixt fool and sage, 1880

- You know—the tolerably-obstinate,
The not-so-much-perverse but you may train,
The true son-servant that, when parent bids
“ Go work, son, in my vineyard ! ” makes reply
“ I go, Sir ! ”—Why, what profit in your son 1885
Beyond the drudges you might subsidize,
Have the same work from, at a paul the head ?
Look at those four young precious olive-plants
Reared at Vittiano,—not on flesh and blood,
These twenty years, but black bread and sour
wine ! 1890

I bade them put forth tender branch, hook, hold,
And hurt three enemies I had in Rome :
They did my hest as unreluctantly,

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK XI

At promise of a dollar, as a son
 Adjured by mumping memories of the past. 1895
 No, nothing repays youth expended so—
 Youth, I say, who am young still : grant but
 leave

To live my life out, to the last I 'd live
 And die conceding age no right of youth !
 It is the will runs the renewing nerve 1900
 Through flaccid flesh that faints before the time.
 Therefore no sort of use for son have I—
 Sick, not of life's feast but of steps to climb
 To the house where life prepares her feast, —of
 means

To the end : for make the end attainable 1905
 Without the means,—my relish were like yours.
 A man may have an appetite enough
 For a whole dish of robins ready cooked,
 And yet lack courage to face sleet, pad snow,
 And snare sufficiently for supper. 1910

Thus

The time 's arrived when, ancient Roman-like,
 I am bound to fall on my own sword : why not
 Say—Tuscan-like, more ancient, better still ?
 Will you hear truth can do no harm nor good ? 1915
 I think I never was at any time
 A Christian, as you nickname all the world,
 Me among others : truce to nonsense now !
 Name me, a primitive religionist—
 As should the aboriginary be 1920
 I boast myself, Etruscan, Aretine,
 One sprung,—your frigid Virgil's fieriest word,—
 From fauns and nymphs, trunks and the heart of
 oak,

With,—for a visible divinity,—
 The portent of a Jove Ægiochus 1925

Descried 'mid clouds, lightning and thunder,
couched

On topmost crag of your Capitoline :

'T is in the Seventh Æneid,—what, the Eighth ?
Right,—thanks, Abate,—though the Christian 's
dumb,

The Latinist 's vivacious in you yet ! 1930

I know my grandsire had our tapestry

Marked with the motto, 'neath a certain shield,

Whereto his grandson presently will give gules

To vary azure. First we fight for faiths,

But get to shake hands at the last of all : 1935

Mine 's your faith too,—in Jove Ægiochus !

Nor do Greek gods, that serve as supplement,

Jar with the simpler scheme, if understood.

We want such intermediary race

To make communication possible ; 1940

The real thing were too lofty, we too low,

Midway hang these : we feel their use so plain

In linking height to depth, that we doff hat

And put no question nor pry narrowly

Into the nature hid behind the names. 1945

We grudge no rite the fancy may demand ;

But never, more than needs, invent, refine,

Improve upon requirement, idly wise

Beyond the letter, teaching gods their trade,

Which is to teach us : we 'll obey when taught. 1950

Why should we do our duty past the need ?

When the sky darkens, Jove is wroth,—say prayer !

When the sun shines and Jove is glad,—sing psalm !

But wherefore pass prescription and devise

Blood-offering for sweat-service, lend the rod 1955

A pungency through pickle of our own ?

Learned Abate,—no one teaches you

What Venus means and who 's Apollo here !

I spare you, Cardinal,—but, though you wince,

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK XI

You know me, I know you, and both know that ! 1960

So, if Apollo bids us fast, we fast :

But where does Venus order we stop sense

When Master Pietro rhymes a pleasantry ?

Give alms prescribed on Friday : but, hold hand

Because your foe lies prostrate,—where 's the word 1965

Explicit in the book debars revenge ?

The rationale of your scheme is just

“ Pay toll here, there pursue your pleasure free ! ”

So do you turn to use the medium-powers,

Mars and Minerva, Bacchus and the rest, 1970

And so are saved propitiating—whom ?

What all-good, all-wise and all-potent Jove

Vexed by the very sins in man, himself

Made life's necessity when man he made ?

Irrational bunglers ! So, the living truth 1975

Revealed to strike Pan dead, ducks low at last,

Prays leave to hold its own and live good days

Provided it go masque grotesquely, called

Christian not Pagan. Oh, you purged the sky

Of all gods save the One, the great and good, 1980

Clapped hands and triumphed ! But the change
came fast :

The inexorable need in man for life—

(Life, you may mulct and minish to a grain

Out of the lump, so that the grain but live)

Laughed at your substituting death for life, 1985

And bade you do your worst : which worst was
done

In just that age styled primitive and pure

When Saint this, Saint that, dutifully starved,

Froze, fought with beasts, was beaten and abused

And finally ridded of his flesh by fire, 1990

He kept life-long unspotted from the world !

Next age, how goes the game, what mortal gives

His life and emulates Saint that, Saint this ?

Men mutter, make excuse or mutiny,
 In fine arc minded all to leave the new, 1995
 Stick to the old,—enjoy old liberty,
 No prejudice in enjoyment, if you please,
 To the new profession : sin o' the sly, henceforth !
 The law stands though the letter kills : what then ?
 The spirit saves as unmistakably. 2000
 Omniscience sees, Omnipotence could stop,
 Omnibenevolence pardons : it must be,
 Frown law its fiercest, there 's a wink somewhere !

Such was the logic in this head of mine :
 I, like the rest, wrote "poison" on my bread, 2005
 But broke and ate :—said "Those that use the
 sword
 "Shall perish by the same" ; then stabbed my foe.
 I stand on solid earth, not empty air :
 Dislodge me, let your Pope's crook hale me hence !
 Not he, nor you ! And I so pity both, 2010
 I 'll make the true charge you want wit to make :
 "Count Guido, who reveal our mystery,
 "And trace all issues to the love of life :
 "We having life to love and guard, like you,
 "Why did you put us upon self-defence ? 2015
 "You well knew what prompt pass-word would
 appease
 "The sentry's ire when folk infringed his bounds,
 "And yet kept mouth shut : do you wonder then
 "If, in mere decency, he shot you dead ?
 "He can't have people play such pranks as yours 2020
 "Beneath his nose at noonday : you disdained
 "To give him an excuse before the world
 "By crying 'I break rule to save our camp !'
 "Under the old rule, such offence were death ;
 "And you had heard the Pontifex pronounce 2025
 " 'Since you slay foe and violate the form,

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" 'Slaying turns murder, which were sacrifice
 " 'Had you, while, say, law-suiting foe to death,
 " 'But raised an altar to the Unknown God
 " 'Or else the Genius of the Vatican.' 2030
 " 'Why then this pother?—all because the Pope,
 " 'Doing his duty, cried 'A foreigner,
 " 'You scandalize the natives : here at Rome
 " ' *Romano vivitur more* : wise men, here,
 " 'Put the Church forward and efface themselves. 2035
 " 'The fit defence had been,—you stamped on
 wheat,
 " 'Intending all the time to trample tares,—
 " 'Were fain extirpate, then, the heretic,
 " 'You now find, in your haste was slain a fool :
 " 'Nor Pietro, nor Violante, nor your wife 2040
 " 'Meant to breed up your babe a Molinist !
 " 'Whence you are duly contrite. Not one word
 " 'Of all this wisdom did you urge : which slip
 " 'Death must atone for.' "

So, let death atone ! 2045

So ends mistake, so end mistakers !—end
 Perhaps to recommence,—how should I know?
 Only, be sure, no punishment, no pain ~
 Childish, preposterous, impossible,
 But some such fate as Ovid could foresee,— 2050
Byblis in fluvium, let the weak soul end
 In water, *sed Lycaon in lupum*, but
 The strong become a wolf for evermore !
 Change that Pompilia to a puny stream
 Fit to reflect the daisies on its bank ! 2055
 Let me turn wolf, be whole, and sate, for once,—
 Wallow in what is now a wolfishness
 Coerced too much by the humanity
 That 's half of me as well ! Grow out of man,
 Glut the wolf-nature,—what remains but grow 2060
 Into the man again, be man indeed

And all man? Do I ring the changes right?
Deformed, transformed, reformed, informed, con-
formed!

The honest instinct, pent and crossed through
life,

Let surge by death into a visible flow 2065

Of rapture : as the strangled thread of flame

Painfully winds, annoying and annoyed,

Malignant and maligned, thro' stone and ore,

Till earth exclude the stranger : vented once,

It finds full play, is recognized a-top 2070

Some mountain as no such abnormal birth,

Fire for the mount, not streamlet for the vale!

Ay, of the water was that wife of mine—

Be it for good, be it for ill, no run

O' the red thread through that insignificance! 2075

Again, how she is at me with those eyes!

Away with the empty stare! Be holy still,

And stupid ever! Occupy your patch

Of private snow that 's somewhere in what world

May now be growing icy round your head, 2080

And aguish at your foot-print,—freeze not me,

Dare follow not another step I take,

Not with so much as those detested eyes,

No, though they follow but to pray me pause

On the incline, earth's edge that 's next to hell! 2085

None of your abnegation of revenge!

Fly at me frank, tug while I tear again!

There 's God, go tell Him, testify your worst!

Not she! There was no touch in her of hate:

And it would prove her hell, if I reached mine! 2090

To know I suffered, would still sadden her,

Do what the angels might to make amends!

Therefore there 's either no such place as hell,

Or thence shall I be thrust forth, for her sake,

And thereby undergo three hells, not one— 2095

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK XI

I who, with outlet for escape to heaven,
 Would tarry if such flight allowed my foe
 To raise his head, relieved of that firm foot
 Had pinned him to the fiery pavement else !
 So am I made, "who did not make myself : " 2100
 (How dared she rob my own lip of the word ?)
 Beware me in what other world may be !—
 Pompilia, who have brought me to this pass !
 All I know here, will I say there, and go
 Beyond the saying with the deed. Some use 2105
 There cannot but be for a mood like mine,
 Implacable, persistent in revenge.
 She maundered "All is over and at end :
 "I go my own road, go you where God will !
 "Forgive you? I forget you!" There 's the
 saint 2110
 That takes your taste, you other kind of men !
 How you had loved her ! Guido wanted skill
 To value such a woman at her worth !
 Properly the instructed criticize
 "What 's here, you simpleton have tossed to take 2115
 'Its chance i' the gutter? This a daub, indeed?
 "Why, 't is a Rafael that you kicked to rags !"
 Perhaps so : some prefer the pure design :
 Give me my gorge of colour, glut of gold
 In a glory round the Virgin made for me ! 2120
 Titian 's the man, not Monk Angelico
 Who traces you some timid chalky ghost
 That turns the church into a charnel : ay,
 Just such a pencil might depict my wife !
 She,—since she, also, would not change herself, — 2125
 Why could not she come in some heart-shaped
 cloud,
 Rainbow'd about with riches, royalty
 Rimming her round, as round the tintless lawn
 Guardingly runs the selvage cloth of gold ?

I would have left the faint fine gauze untouched, 2130
 Needle-worked over with its lily and rose,
 Let her bleach unmolested in the midst,
 Chill that selected solitary spot
 Of quietude she pleased to think was life.
 Purity, pallor grace the lawn no doubt 2135
 When there 's the costly bordure to unthread
 And make again an ingot : but what 's grace
 When you want meat and drink and clothes and
 fire ?

A tale comes to my mind that 's apposite—
 Possibly true, probably false, a truth 2140
 Such as all truths we live by, Cardinal !
 'T is said, a certain ancestor of mine
 Followed—whoever was the potentate,
 To Paynimrie, and in some battle, broke
 Through more than due allowance of the foe, 2145
 And, risking much his own life, saved the lord's.
 Battered and bruised, the Emperor scrambles up,
 Rubs his eyes and looks round and sees my sire,
 Picks a furze-sprig from out his hauberk-joint,
 (Token how near the ground went majesty) 2150
 And says "Take this, and if thou get safe home,
 "Plant the same in thy garden-ground to grow :
 "Run thence an hour in a straight line, and stop:
 "Describe a circle round (for central point)
 "The furze aforesaid, reaching every way 2155
 "The length of that hour's run : I give it thee,—
 "The central point, to build a castle there,
 "The space circumjacent, for fit demesne,
 "The whole to be thy children's heritage,—
 "Whom, for thy sake, bid thou wear furze on cap!" 2160
 Those are my arms : we turned the furze a tree
 To show more, and the greyhound tied thereto,
 Straining to start, means swift and greedy both ;
 He stands upon a triple mount of gold—

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK XI

By Jove, then, he 's escaping from true gold 2165
 And trying to arrive at empty air !

Aha ! the fancy never crossed my mind !

My father used to tell me, and subjoin

“ As for the castle, that took wings and flew :

“ The broad lands,—why, to traverse them to-day 2170

“ Scarce tasks my gouty feet, and in my prime

“ I doubt not I could stand and spit so far :

“ But for the furze, boy, fear no lack of that,

“ So long as fortune leaves one field to grub !

“ Wherefore, hurra for furze and loyalty ! ” 2175

What may I mean, where may the lesson lurk ?

“ Do not bestow on man, by way of gift,

“ Furze without land for framework,—vaunt no
 grace

“ Of purity, no furze-sprig of a wife,

“ To me, i' the thick of battle for my bread, 2185

“ Without some better dowry,—gold will do ! ”

No better gift than sordid muck ? Yes, Sirs !

Many more gifts much better. Give them me !

O those Olimpias bold, those Biancas brave,

That brought a husband power worth Ormuz'
 wealth ! 2195

Cried “ Thou being mine, why, what but thine
 am I ?

“ Be thou to me law, right, wrong, heaven and hell !

“ Let us blend souls, blent, thou in me, to bid

“ Two bodies work one pleasure ! What are
 these

“ Called king, priest, father, mother, stranger,
 friend ? 2197

“ They fret thee or they frustrate ? Give the
 word—

“ Be certain they shall frustrate nothing more !

“ And who is this young florid foolishness

“ That holds thy fortune in his pigmy clutch,

- "—Being a prince and potency, forsooth !— 2195
 "He hesitates to let the trifle go ?
 "Let me but seal up eye, sing ear to sleep
 "Sounder than Samson,—pounce thou on the
 prize
 "Shall slip from off my breast, and down couch-
 side,
 "And on to floor, and far as my lord's feet— 2200
 "Where he stands in the shadow with the knife,
 "Waiting to see what Delilah dares do !
 "Is the youth fair ? What is a man to me
 "Who am thy call-bird ? Twist his neck—my
 dupe's,—
 "Then take the breast shall turn a breast indeed !" 2205
 Such women are there ; and they marry whom ?
 Why, when a man has gone and hanged himself
 Because of what he calls a wicked wife,—
 See, if the very turpitude bemoaned
 Prove not mere excellence the fool ignores ! 2210
 His monster is perfection,—Circe, sent
 Straight from the sun, with wand the idiot
 blames
 As not an honest distaff to spin wool !
 O thou Lucrezia, is it long to wait
 Yonder where all the gloom is in a glow 2215
 With thy suspected presence ?—virgin yet,
 Virtuous again, in face of what 's to teach—
 Sin unimagined, unimaginable,—
 I come to claim my bride,—thy Borgia's self
 Not half the burning bridegroom I shall be ! 2220
 Cardinal, take away your crucifix !
 Abate, leave my lips alone,—they bite !
 Vainly you try to change what should not change,
 And shall not. I have bared, you bathe my
 heart—
 •It grows the stonier for your saving dew ! 2225

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK XI

You steep the substance, you would lubricate,
In waters that but touch to petrify !

You too are petrifications of a kind :
Move not a muscle that shows mercy. Rave
Another twelve hours, every word were waste ! 2230
I thought you would not slay impenitence,
But teased, from men you slew, contrition first,—
I thought you had a conscience. Cardinal,
You know I am wronged !—wronged, say, and
wronged, maintain.

Was this strict inquisition made for blood 2235
When first you showed us scarlet on your back,
Called to the College? Your straightforward way
To your legitimate end,—I think it passed
Over a scantling of heads brained, hearts broke,
Lives trodden into dust ! How otherwise ? 2240
Such was the way o' the world, and so you walked.
Does memory haunt your pillow ? Not a whit.
God wills you never pace your garden-path,
One appetizing hour ere dinner-time,
But your intrusion there treads out of life 2245
A universe of happy innocent things :
Feel you remorse about that damsel-fly
Which buzzed so near your mouth and flapped
your face ?

You blotted it from being at a blow :
It was a fly, you were a man, and more, 2250
Lord of created things, so took your course.
Manliness, mind,—these are things fit to save,
Fit to brush fly from : why, because I take
My course, must needs the Pope kill me ?—kill
you !

You ! for this instrument, he throws away, 2255
Is strong to serve a master, and were yours
To have and hold and get much good from out !

The Pope who dooms me needs must die next
year ;

I 'll tell you how the chances are supposed
For his successor : first the Chamberlain, 2260
Old San Cesario,—Colloredo, next,—
Then, one, two, three, four, I refuse to name ;
After these, comes Altieri ; then come you—
Seventh on the list you come, unless . . . ha,
ha,

How can a dead hand give a friend a lift ? 2265

Are you the person to despise the help

O' the head shall drop in pannier presently ?

So a child seesaws on or kicks away

The fulcrum-stone that 's all the sage requires

To fit his lever to and move the world. 2270

Cardinal, I adjure you in God's name,

Save my life, fall at the Pope's feet, set forth

Things your own fashion, not in words like these

Made for a sense like yours who apprehend !

Translate into the Court-conventional 2275

“Count Guido must not die, is innocent !

“Fair, be assured ! But what an he were foul,

“Blood-drenched and murder-crust head to
foot ?

“Spare one whose death insults the Emperor,

“Nay, outrages the Louis you so love ! 2280

“He has friends who will avenge him ; enemies

“Who will hate God now with impunity,

“Missing the old coercive : would you send

“A soul straight to perdition, dying frank

“An atheist ?” Go and say this, for God's sake ! 2285

—Why, you don't think I hope you 'll say one
word ?

Neither shall I persuade you from your stand

Nor you persuade me from my station : take

Your crucifix away, I tell you twice !

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK XI

Come, I am tired of silence ! Pause enough ! 2290
 You have prayed : I have gone inside my soul
 And shut its door behind me : 't is your torch
 Makes the place dark : the darkness let alone
 Grows tolerable twilight : one may grope
 And get to guess at length and breadth and depth. 2295
 What is this fact I feel persuaded of—
 This something like a foothold in the sea,
 Although Saint Peter's bark scuds, billow-borne,
 Leaves me to founder where it flung me first ?
 Spite of your splashing, I am high and dry ! 2300
 God takes his own part in each thing He made ;
 Made for a reason, He conserves his work,
 Gives each its proper instinct of defence.
 My lamblike wife could neither bark nor bite,
 She bleated, bleated, till for pity pure 2305
 The village roused up, ran with pole and prong
 To the rescue, and behold the wolf 's at bay !
 Shall he try bleating ?—or take turn or two,
 Since the wolf owns some kinship with the fox,
 And, failing to escape the foe by craft, 2310
 Give up attempt, die fighting quietly ?
 The last bad blow that strikes fire in at eye
 And on to brain, and so out, life and all,
 How can it but be cheated of a pang
 If, fighting quietly, the jaws enjoy 2315
 One re-embrace in mid back-bone they break,
 After their weary work thro' the foe's flesh ?
 That 's the wolf-nature. Don't mistake my trope !
 A Cardinal so qualmish ? Eminence,
 My fight is figurative, blows i' the air, 2320
 Brain-war with powers and principalities,
 Spirit-bravado, no real fisticuffs !
 I shall not presently, when the knock comes,
 Cling to this bench nor claw the hangman's face,
 No, trust me ! I conceive worse lots than mine. 2325

Whether it be, the old contagious fit
 And plague o' the prison have surprised me too,
 The appropriate drunkenness of the death-hour
 Crept on my sense, kind work o' the wine and
 myrrh,—

I know not,—I begin to taste my strength, 2330
 Careless, gay even. What 's the worth of life?
 The Pope 's dead now, my murderous old man,
 For Tozzi told me so : and you, forsooth—
 Why, you don't think, Abate, do your best,
 You 'll live a year more with that hacking cough 2335
 And blotch of crimson where the cheek 's a pit?
 Tozzi has got you also down in book!
 Cardinal, only seventh of seventy near,
 Is not one called Albano in the lot?
 Go eat your heart, you 'll never be a Pope ! 2340
 Inform me, is it true you left your love,
 A Pucci, for promotion in the church?
 She 's more than in the church,—in the church-
 yard !

Plautilla Pucci, your affianced bride,
 Has dust now in the eyes that held the love,— 2345
 And Martinez, suppose they make you Pope,
 Stops that with *veto*,—so, enjoy yourself!
 I see you all reel to the rock, you waves—
 Some forthright, some describe a sinuous track,
 Some, crested brilliantly, with heads above, 2350
 Some in a strangled swirl sunk who knows how,
 But all bound whither the main-current sets,
 Rockward, an end in foam for all of you !
 What if I be o'ertaken, pushed to the front
 By all you crowding smoother souls behind, 2355
 And reach, a minute sooner than was meant,
 The boundary whereon I break to mist?
 Go to ! the smoothest safest of you all,
 Most perfect and compact wave in my train,

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK XI

Spite of the blue tranquillity above, 2360
 Spite of the breadth before of lapsing peace
 Where broods the halcyon and the fish leaps free,
 Will presently begin to feel the prick
 At lazy heart, the push at torpid brain,
 Will rock vertiginously in turn, and reel, 2365
 And, emulative, rush to death like me.
 Later or sooner by a minute then,
 So much for the untimeliness of death !
 And, as regards the manner that offends,
 The rude and rough, I count the same for gain. 2370
 Be the act harsh and quick ! Undoubtedly
 The soul 's condensed and, twice itself, expands
 To burst thro' life, by alternation due,
 Into the other state whate'er it prove.
 You never know what life means till you die : 2375
 Even throughout life, 't is death that makes life live,
 Gives it whatever the significance.
 For see, on your own ground and argument,
 Suppose life had no death to fear, how find
 A possibility of nobleness 2380
 In man, prevented daring any more ?
 What 's love, what 's faith without a worst to dread ?
 Lack-lustre jewelry ! but faith and love
 With death behind them bidding do or die—
 Put such a foil at back, the sparkle 's born ! 2385
 From out myself how the strange colours come !
 Is there a new rule in another world ?
 Be sure I shall resign myself : as here
 I recognized no law I could not see,
 There, what I see, I shall acknowledge too : 2390
 On earth I never took the Pope for God,
 In heaven I shall scarce take God for the Pope.
 Unmanned, remanned : I hold it probable—
 With something changeless at the heart of me
 To know me by, some nucleus that 's myself : 2395

Accretions did it wrong? Away with them—
You soon shall see the use of fire!

Till when,

All that was, is; and must forever be.
Nor is it in me to unhate my hates,—
I use up my last strength to strike once more 2400
Old Pietro in the wine-house-gossip-face,
To trample underfoot the whine and wile
Of beast Violante,—and I grow one gorge
To loathingly reject Pompilia's pale 2405
Poison my hasty hunger took for food.
A strong tree wants no wreaths about its trunk,
No cloying cups, no sickly sweet of scent,
But sustenance at root, a bucketful.
How else lived that Athenian who died so, 2410
Drinking hot bull's blood, fit for men like me?
I lived and died a man, and take man's chance,
Honest and bold: right will be done to such.

Who are these you have let descend my stair?
Ha, their accursed psalm! Lights at the sill! 2415
Is it "Open" they dare bid you? Treachery!
Sirs, have I spoken one word all this while
Out of the world of words I had to say?
Not one word! All was folly—I laughed and
mocked!

Sirs, my first true word, all truth and no lie, 2420
Is—save me notwithstanding! Life is all!
I was just stark mad,—let the madman live
Pressed by as many chains as you please pile!
Don't open! Hold me from them! I am yours.
I am the Granduke's—no, I am the Pope's! 2425
Abate,—Cardinal,—Christ,—Maria,—God, . . .
Pompilia, will you let them murder me?

XII.—THE BOOK AND THE RING

HERE were the end, had anything an end :
Thus, lit and launched, up and uproared and soared
A rocket, till the key o' the vault was reached
And wide heaven held, a breathless minute-space,
In brilliant usurpature : thus caught spark, 5
Rushed to the height, and hung at full of fame
Over men's upturned faces, ghastly thence,
Our glaring Guido : now decline must be.
In its explosion, you have seen his act,
By my power—may-be, judged it by your own,— 10
Or composite as good orbs prove, or crammed
With worse ingredients than the Wormwood Star.
The act, over and ended, falls and fades :
What was once seen, grows what is now described,
Then talked of, told about, a tinge the less 15
In every fresh transmission ; till it melts,
Trickles in silent orange or wan grey
Across our memory, dies and leaves all dark,
And presently we find the stars again.
Follow the main streaks, meditate the mode 20
Of brightness, how it hastes to blend with black !

After that February Twenty-Two,
Since our salvation, Sixteen-Ninety-Eight,
Of all reports that were, or may have been,
Concerning those the day killed or let live, 25
Four I count only. Take the first that comes.
A letter from a stranger, man of rank,
Venetian visitor at Rome,—who knows,

BOOK XII THE BOOK AND THE RING

On what pretence of busy idleness?

Thus he begins on evening of that day.

30

“ Here are we at our end of Carnival ;
“ Prodigious gaiety and monstrous mirth,
“ And constant shift of entertaining show :
“ With influx, from each quarter of the globe,
“ Of strangers nowise wishful to be last 35
“ I’ the struggle for a good place presently
“ When that befalls fate cannot long defer.
“ The old Pope totters on the verge o’ the grave :
“ You see, Malpichi understood far more
“ Than Tozzi how to treat the ailments : age, 40
“ No question, renders these inveterate.
“ Cardinal Spada, actual Minister,
“ Is possible Pope ; I wager on his head,
“ Since those four entertainments of his niece
“ Which set all Rome a-stare : Pope probably— 45
“ Though Colloredo has his backers too,
“ And San Cesario makes one doubt at times :
“ Altieri will be Chamberlain at most.

“ A week ago the sun was warm like May,
“ And the old man took daily exercise 50
“ Along the river-side ; he loves to see
“ That Custom-house he built upon the bank,
“ For, Naples born, his tastes are maritime :
“ But yesterday he had to keep in-doors
“ Because of the outrageous rain that fell. 55
“ On such days the good soul has fainting-fits,
“ Or lies in stupor, scarcely makes believe
“ Of minding business, fumbles at his beads.
“ They say, the trust that keeps his heart alive
“ Is that, by lasting till December next, 60
“ He may hold Jubilee a second time,

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK XII

" And, twice in one reign, ope the Holy Doors.
 " By the way, somebody responsible
 " Assures me that the King of France has writ
 " Fresh orders : Fénelon will be condemned : 65
 " The Cardinal makes a wry face enough,
 " Having a love for the delinquent : still,
 " He 's the ambassador, must press the point.
 " Have you a wager too, dependent here ?

 " Now, from such matters to divert awhile, 70
 " Hear of to-day's event which crowns the week.
 " Casts all the other wagers into shade.
 " Tell Dandolo I owe him fifty drops
 " Of heart's blood in the shape of gold zecchines !
 " The Pope has done his worst : I have to pay 75
 " For the execution of the Count, by Jove !
 " Two days since, I reported him as safe,
 " Re-echoing the conviction of all Rome :
 " Who could suspect its one deaf ear—the Pope's ?
 " But prejudices grow insuperable, 80
 " And that old enmity to Austria, that
 " Passion for France and France's pageant-king
 " (Of which, why pause to multiply the proofs
 " Now scandalously rife in Europe's mouth ?)
 " These fairly got the better in our man 85
 " Of justice, prudence, and *esprit de corps*,
 " And he persisted in the butchery.
 " Also, 't is said that in his latest walk
 " To that Dogana-by-the-Bank he built,
 " The crowd,—he suffers question, unrebuked,— 90
 " Asked, ' Whether murder was a privilege
 " ' Only reserved for nobles like the Count ? '
 " And he was ever mindful of the mob.
 " Martinez, the Cæsarian Minister,
 " —Who used his best endeavours to spare blood, 95
 " And strongly pleaded for the life ' of one, '

BOOK XII THE BOOK AND THE RING

" Urged he, ' I may have dined at table with ! '—
 " He will not soon forget the Pope's rebuff,
 " —Feels the slight sensibly, I promise you !
 " And but for the dissuasion of two eyes 100
 " That make with him foul weather or fine day,
 " He had abstained, nor graced the spectacle :
 " As it was, barely would he condescend
 " Look forth from the *palchetto* where he sat
 " Under the Pincian : we shall hear of this. 105
 " The substituting, too, the People's Square
 " For the out-o'-the-way old quarter by the Bridge,
 " Was meant as a conciliatory sop
 " To the mob ; it gave one holiday the more.
 " But the French Embassy might unfurl flag,— 110
 " Still the good luck of France to fling a foe !
 " Cardinal Bouillon triumphs properly.
 " *Palchetti* were erected in the Place,
 " And houses, at the edge of the Three Streets,
 " Let their front windows at six dollars each : 115
 " Anguisciola, that patron of the arts,
 " Hired one ; our Envoy Contarini too.

 " Now for the thing ; no sooner the decree
 " Gone forth,—'t is four-and-twenty hours ago,—
 " Than Acciaiuoli and Panciatichi, 120
 " Old friends, indeed compatriots of the man,
 " Being pitched on as the couple properest
 " To intimate the sentence yesternight,
 " Were closeted ere cock-crow with the Count.
 " They both report their efforts to dispose 125
 " The unhappy nobleman for ending well,
 " Despite the natural sense of injury,
 " Were crowned at last with a complete success.
 " And when the Company of Death arrived
 " At twenty-hours,—the way they reckon here,— 130
 " We say, at sunset, after dinner-time,—

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK XII

"The Count was led down, hoisted up on car,
 "Last of the five, as heinous, you know :
 "Yet they allowed one whole car to each man.
 "His intrepidity, nay, nonchalance, 135
 "As up he stood and down he sat himself,
 "Struck admiration into those who saw.
 "Then the procession started, took the way
 "From the New Prisons by the Pilgrim's Street,
 "The street of the Governo, Pasquin's Street, 140
 "(Where was stuck up, mid other epigrams,
 "A quatrain . . . but of all that, presently !)
 "The Place Navona, the Pantheon's Place,
 "Place of the Column, last the Corso's length,
 "And so debouched thence at Mannaia's foot 145
 "I' the Place o' the People. As is evident,
 "(Despite the malice,—plainly meant, I fear,
 "By this abrupt change of locality,—
 "The Square 's no such bad place to head and
 hang)
 "We had the titillation as we sat 150
 "Assembled, (quality in conclave, ha ?)
 "Of, minute after minute, some report
 "How the slow show was winding on its way.
 "Now did a car run over, kill a man,
 "Just opposite a pork-shop numbered Twelve : 155
 "And bitter were the outcries of the mob
 "Against the Pope : for, but that he forbids
 "The Lottery, why, Twelve were Tern Quatern !
 "Now did a beggar by Saint Agnes, lame 160
 "From his youth up, recover use of leg,
 "Through prayer of Guido as he glanced that way :
 "So that the crowd nearcrammed his hat with coin.
 "Thus was kept up excitement to the last,
 "—Not an abrupt out-bolting, as of yore,
 "From Castle, over Bridge and on to block, 165
 "And so all ended ere you well could wink !

BOOK XII THE BOOK AND THE RING

"To mount the scaffold-steps, Guido was last
 "Here also, as atrociouslest in crime.
 "We hardly noticed how the peasants died,
 "They dangled somehow soon to right and left, 170
 "And we remained all ears and eyes, could give
 "Ourselves to Guido undividedly,
 "As he harangued the multitude beneath.
 "He begged forgiveness on the part of God,
 "And fair construction of his act from men, 175
 "Whose suffrage he entreated for his soul,
 "Suggesting that we should forthwith repeat
 "A *Pater* and an *Ave*, with the hymn
 "Salve *Regina Cæli*, for his sake.
 "Which said, he turned to the confessor, crossed 180
 "And reconciled himself, with decency,
 "Oft glancing at Saint Mary's opposite,
 "Where they possess, and showed in shrine to-day,
 "The blessed *Umbilicus* of our Lord,
 "(A relic 't is believed no other church 185
 "In Rome can boast of)—then rose up, as brisk
 "Knelt down again, bent head, adapted neck,
 "And, with the name of Jesus on his lips,
 "Received the fatal blow.
 "The headsman showed 190
 "The head to the populace. Must I avouch
 "We strangers own to disappointment here?
 "Report pronounced him fully six feet high,
 "Youngish, considering his fifty years,
 "And, if not handsome, dignified at least. 195
 "Indeed, it was no face to please a wife!
 "His friends say, this was caused by the costume:
 "He wore the dress he did the murder in,
 "That is, a *just-a-corps* of russet serge,

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK XII

"Black camisole, coarse cloak of baracan 200
 "(So they style here the garb of goat's-hair cloth)
 "White hat and cotton cap beneath, poor Count,
 "Preservative against the evening dews
 "During the journey from Arezzo. Well,
 "So died the man, and so his end was peace ; 205
 "Whence many a moral were to meditate.
 "Spada,—you may bet Dandolo,—is Pope !
 "Now for the quatrain !"

No, friend, this will do !

You've sputtered into sparks. What streak comes
 next ? 210

A letter : Don Giacinto Arcangeli,
 Doctor and Proctor, him I made you mark
 Buckle to business in his study late,
 The virtuous sire, the valiant for the truth,
 Acquaints his correspondent,—Florentine, 215
 By name Cencini, advocate as well,
Socius and brother-in-the-devil to match,—
 A friend of Franceschini, anyhow,
 And knit up with the bowels of the case,—
 Acquaints him, (in this paper that I touch) 220
 How their joint effort to obtain reprieve
 For Guido had so nearly nicked the nine
 And ninety and one over,—folk would say
 At Tarocs,—or succeeded,—in our phrase.
 To this Cencini's care I owe the Book, 225
 The yellow thing I take and toss once more,—
 How will it be, my four-years'-intimate,
 When thou and I part company anon ?—
 'T was he, the "whole position of the case,"
 Pleading and summary, were put before ; 230
 Discreetly in my Book he bound them all,
 Adding some three epistles to the point.

BOOK XII THE BOOK AND THE RING

Here is the first of these, part fresh as penned,
The sand, that dried the ink, not rubbed away,
Though penned the day whereof it tells the deed : 235
Part—extant just as plainly, you know where,
Whence came the other stuff, went, you know
how,
To make the Ring that 's all but round and done.

“Late they arrived, too late, egregious Sir,
“Those same justificative points you urge 240
“Might benefit His Blessed Memory
“Count Guido Franceschini now with God :
“Since the Court,—to state things succinctly,—
styled
“The Congregation of the Governor,
“Having resolved on Tuesday last our cause 245
“I' the guilty sense, with death for punishment,
“Spite of all pleas by me deducible
“In favour of said Blessed Memory,—
“I, with expenditure of pains enough,
“Obtained a respite, leave to claim and prove 250
“Exemption from the law's award,—alleged
“The power and privilege of the Clericate :
“To which effect a courier was despatched.
“But ere an answer from Arezzo came,
“The Holiness of our Lord the Pope (prepare !) 255
“Judging it inexpedient to postpone
“The execution of such sentence passed,
“Saw fit, by his particular cheirograph,
“To derogate, dispense with privilege,
“And wink at any hurt accruing thence 260
“To Mother Church through damage of her son :
“Also, to overpass and set aside
“That other plea on score of tender age,
“Put forth by me to do Pasquini good,

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK XII

"One of the four in trouble with our friend. 265
 "So that all five, to-day, have suffered death
 "With no distinction save in dying,—he,
 "Decollate by mere due of privilege,
 "The rest hanged decently and in order. Thus
 "Came the Count to his end of gallant man, 270
 "Defunct in faith and exemplarity :
 "Nor shall the shield of His great house lose
 shine
 "Thereby, nor its blue banner blush to red.
 "This, too, should yield sustainment to our
 hearts—
 "He had commiseration and respect 275
 "In his decease from universal Rome,
 "*Quantum est hominum venustiorum*,
 "The nice and cultivated everywhere :
 "Though, in respect of me his advocate,
 "Needs must I groan o'er my debility, 280
 "Attribute the untoward event o' the strife
 "To nothing but my own crass ignorance
 "Which failed to set the valid reasons forth,
 "Find fit excuse : such is the fate of war !
 "May God compensate us the direful blow 285
 "By future blessings on his family,
 "Whereof I lowly beg the next commands ;
 "—Whereto, as humbly, I confirm myself . . ."

And so forth,—follow name and place and date.
 On next leaf—

290

"*Hactenus senioribus !*

"There, old fox, show the clients t' other side
 "And keep this corner sacred, I beseech !
 "You and your pleas and proofs were what folk
 call
 "Pisan assistance, aid that comes too late, 295
 "Saves a man dead as nail in post of door.

BOOK XII THE BOOK AND THE RING

"Had I but time and space for narrative !
 "What was the good of twenty Clericates
 "When Somebody's thick headpiece once was bent
 "On seeing Guido's drop into the bag ? 300
 "How these old men like giving youth a push !
 "So much the better : next push goes to him,
 "And a new Pope begins the century.
 "Much good I get by my superb defence !
 "But argument is solid and subsists, 305
 "While obstinacy and ineptitude
 "Accompany the owner to his tomb—
 "What do I care how soon ? Beside, folk see !
 "Rome will have relished heartily the show,
 "Yet understood the motives, never fear, 310
 "Which caused the indecent change o' the People's
 Place
 "To the People's Playground—stigmatize the spite
 "Which in a trice precipitated things !
 "As oft the moribund will give a kick
 "To show they are not absolutely dead, 315
 "So feebleness i' the socket shoots its last,
 "A spirt of violence for energy !

 "But thou, Cencini, brother of my breast,
 "O fox whose home is 'mid the tender grape,
 "Whose couch in Tuscany by Themis' throne, 320
 "Subject to no such . . . best I shut my mouth
 "Or only open it again to say,
 "This pother and confusion fairly laid,
 "My hands are empty and my satchel lank.
 "Now then for both the Matrimonial Cause 325
 "And the Case of Gomez ! Serve them hot and
 hot !

"*Reliqua differamus in crastinum !*"

"The impatient estafette cracks wh' outside :

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK XII

"Still, though the earth should swallow him who
 swears
 "And me who make the mischief, in must slip— 330
 "My boy, your godson, fat-chaps Hyacinth,
 "Enjoyed the sight while Papa plodded here.
 "I promised him, the rogue, a month ago,
 "The day his birthday was, of all the days,
 "That if I failed to save Count Guido's head, 335
 "Cinuccio should at least go see it chopped
 "From trunk—'So, latinize your thanks!' quoth I.
 "'That I prefer, *hoc malim*,' raps me out
 "The rogue: you notice the subjunctive? Ah!
 "Accordingly he sat there, bold in box, 340
 "Proud as the Pope behind the peacock-fans:
 "Whereon a certain lady-patroness
 "For whom I manage things (my boy in front,
 "Her Marquis sat the third in evidence;
 "Boys have no eyes nor ears save for the show) 345
 "'This time, Cintino,' was her sportive word,
 "When whiz and thump went axe and mowed
 lay man,
 "And folk could fall to the suspended chat,
 "'This time, you see, Bottini rules the roast,
 "'Nor can Papa with all his eloquence 350
 "'Be reckoned on to help as heretofore!'
 "Whereat Cinone pouts; then, sparkishly—
 "'Papa knew better than aggrieve his Pope,
 "'And baulk him of his grudge against our Count,
 "'Else he 'd have argued-off Bottini's' . . . what? 355
 "'His nose,'—the rogue! well parried of the boy!
 "He 's long since out of Cæsar (eight years old)
 "And as for tripping in Eutropius . . . well,
 "Reason the more that we strain every nerve
 "To do him justice, mould a model-mouth, 360
 "A Bartolus-cum-Baldo for next age:
 "For that I purse the pieces, work the brain,

BOOK XII THE BOOK AND THE RING

"And want both Gomez and the marriage-case,
 "Success with which shall plaster aught of pate
 "That 's broken in me by Bottini's flail, 365
 "And bruise his own, belike, that wags and brags.
 "*Adverti supplico humiliter*
 "Quod don't the fungus see, the fop divine
 "That one hand drives two horses, left and right?
 "With this rein did I rescue from the ditch 370
 "The fortune of our Franceschini, keep
 "Unsplashed the credit of a noble House,
 "And set the fashionable cause at Rome
 "A-prancing till bystanders shouted 'ware!' 375
 "The other rein's judicious management
 "Suffered old Somebody to keep the pace,
 "Hobblingly play the roadster: who but he
 "Had his opinion, was not led by the nose
 "In leash of quibbles strung to look like law!
 "You 'll soon see,—when I go to pay devoir 380
 "And compliment him on confuting me,—
 "If, by a back-swing of the pendulum,
 "Grace be not, thick and threefold, consequent.
 "“I must decide as I see proper, Don!
 "“I 'm Pope, I have my inward lights for guide. 385
 "“Had learning been the matter in dispute,
 "“Could eloquence avail to gainsay fact,
 "“Yours were the victory, be comforted!
 "Cinuzzo will be gainer by it all.
 "Quick then with Gomez, hot and hot next case!” 390

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Follows, a letter, takes the other side.
 Tall blue-eyed Fisc whose head is capped with
 cloud,
 Doctor Bottini,—to no matter who,
 Writes on the Monday two days afterward.
 Now shall the honest championship of right, 95

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK XII

Crowned with success, enjoy at last, unblamed,
 Moderate triumph ! Now shall eloquence
 Poured forth in fancied floods for virtue's sake,
 (The print is sorrowfully dyked and dammed,
 But shows where fain the unbridled force would
 flow, 400
 Finding a channel)—now shall this refresh
 The thirsty donor with a drop or two !
 Here has been truth at issue with a lie :
 Let who gained truth the day have handsome pride
 In his own prowess ! Eh ! What ails the man ? 405

“ Well, it is over, ends as I foresaw :
 “ Easily proved, Pompilia's innocence !
 “ Catch them entrusting Guido's guilt to me
 “ Who had, as usual, the plain truth to plead.
 “ I always knew the clearness of the stream 410
 “ Would show the fish so thoroughly, child might
 prong
 “ The clumsy monster : with no mud to splash,
 “ Small credit to lynx-eye and lightning-spear !
 “ This Guido,—(much sport he contrived to make,
 “ Who at first twist, preamble of the cord, 415
 “ Turned white, told all, like the poltroon he
 was !)—
 “ Finished, as you expect, a penitent,
 “ Fully confessed his crime, and made amends,
 “ And, edifying Rome last Saturday,
 “ Died like a saint, poor devil ! That 's the man 420
 “ The gods still give to my antagonist :
 “ Imagine how Arcangeli claps wing
 “ And crows ! ‘ Such formidable facts to face,
 “ ‘ So naked to attack, my client here,
 “ ‘ And yet I kept a month the Fisc at bay, 425
 “ ‘ And in the end had foiled him of the prize

308

BOOK XII THE BOOK AND THE RING

“ ‘By this arch-stroke, this plea of privilege,
“ ‘But that the Pope must gratify his whim,
“ ‘Put in his word, poor old man,—let it pass!’
“ —Such is the cue to which all Rome responds. 430
“ What with the plain truth given me to uphold,
“ And, should I let truth slip, the Pope at hand
“ To pick up, steady her on legs again,
“ My office turns a pleasantry indeed!
“ Not that the burly boaster did one jot 435
“ O’ the little was to do—young Spreti’s work!
“ But for him,—mannikin and dandiprat,
“ Mere candle-end and inch of cleverness
“ Stuck on Arcangeli’s save-all,—but for him
“ The spruce young Spreti, what is badwereworse! 440

“ I looked that Rome should have the natural gird
“ At advocate with case that proves itself;
“ I knew Arcangeli would grin and brag:
“ But what say you to one impertinence
“ Might move a stone? That monk, you are to
know, 445
“ That barefoot Augustinian whose report
“ O’ the dying woman’s words did detriment
“ To my best points it took the freshness from,
“ —That meddler preached to purpose yesterday
“ At San Lorenzo as a winding-up 450
“ O’ the show which proved a treasure to the
church.
“ Out comes his sermon smoking from the press:
“ Its text—‘Let God be true, and every man
“ ‘A liar’—and its application, this 455
“ The longest-winded of the paragraphs,
“ I straight unstitch, tear out and treat you with:
“ ’Tis piping hot and posts through Rome to-day.
“ Remember it, as I engage to do!

- "But if you rather be disposed to see
 "In the result of the long trial here,— 460
 "This dealing doom to guilt and doling praise
 "To innocency,—any proof that truth
 "May look for vindication from the world,
 "Much will you have misread the signs, I say.
 "God, who seems acquiescent in the main 465
 "With those who add 'So will he ever sleep'—
 "Flutters their foolishness from time to time,
 "Puts forth His right-hand recognizably ;
 "Even as, to fools who deem He needs must right
 "Wrong on the instant, as if earth were heaven, 470
 "He wakes remonstrance—'Passive, Lord, how
 long ?'
 "Because Pompilia's purity prevails,
 "Conclude you, all truth triumphs in the end ?
 "So might those old inhabitants of the ark,
 "Witnessing haply their dove's safe return, 475
 "Pronounce there was no danger, all the while
 "O' the deluge, to the creature's counterparts,
 "Aught that beat wing i' the world, was white or
 soft,—
 "And that the lark, the thrush, the culvēr too,
 "Might equally have traversed air, found earth, 480
 "And brought back olive-branch in unharmed bill.
 "Methinks I hear the Patriarch's warning voice—
 "'Though this one breast, by miracle, return,
 "'No wave rolls by, in all the waste, but bears
 "'Within it some dead dove-like thing as dear, 485
 "'Beauty made blank and harmlessness de-
 stroyed !'
 "How many chaste and noble sister-fames
 "Wanted the extricating hand, so lie
 "Strangled, for one Pompilia proud above
 "The welter, plucked from the world's calumny, 490
 "Stupidity, simplicity,—who cares ?

BOOK XII THE BOOK AND THE RING

"Romans! An elder race possessed your land
 "Long ago, and a false faith lingered still,
 "As shades do, though the morning-star be out.
 "Doubtless some pagan of the twilight-day 495
 "Has often pointed to a cavern-mouth
 "Obnoxious to beholders, hard by Rome,
 "And said,—nor he a bad man, no, nor fool,
 "Only a man born blind like all his mates,—
 "“Here skulk in safety, lurk, defying law, 500
 "“The devotees to execrable creed,
 "“Adoring—with what culture . . . Jove, avert
 "“Thy vengeance from us worshippers of thee! . . .
 "“‘What rites obscene—their idol-god, an Ass!’
 "So went the word forth, so acceptance found, 505
 "So century re-echoed century,
 "Cursed the accursed,—and so, from sire to son,
 "You Romans cried ‘The offscourings of our race
 "“Corrupt within the depths there: fitly fiends
 "“Perform a temple-service o’er the dead: 510
 "“Child, gather garment round thee, pass nor
 pry!’
 "Thus groaned your generations: till the time
 "Grew ripe, and lightning had revealed, belike,—
 "Thro’ crevice peeped into by curious fear,—
 "Some object even fear could recognize 515
 "I’ the place of spectres; on the illumined wall,
 "To-wit, some nook, tradition talks about,
 "Narrow and short, a corpse’s length, no more:
 "And by it, in the due receptacle,
 "The little rude brown lamp of earthenware, 520
 "The cruse, was meant for flowers but now held
 blood,
 "The rough-scratched palm-branch, and the
 legend left
 "Pro Christo. Then the mystery lay clear:
 "The abhorred one was a martyr all the time,

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK XII

- "Heaven's saint whereof earth was not worthy.
 What? 525
 "Do you continue in the old belief?
 "Where blackness bides unbroke, must devils
 brood?
 "Is it so certain not another cell
 "O' the myriad that make up the catacomb
 "Contains some saint a second flash would show? 530
 "Will you ascend into the light of day
 "And, having recognized a martyr's shrine,
 "Go join the votaries that gape around
 "Each vulgar god that awes the market-place?
 "Are these the objects of your praising? See! 535
 "In the outstretched right hand of Apollo, there,
 "Lies screened a scorpion: housed amid the folds
 "Of Juno's mantle lurks a centipede!
 "Each statue of a god were fitlier styled
 "Demon and devil. Glorify no brass 540
 "That shines like burnished gold in noonday
 glare,
 "For fools! Be otherwise instructed, you!
 "And preferably ponder, ere ye judge,
 "Each incident of this strange human play
 "Privily acted on a theatre 545
 "That seemed secure from every gaze but God's,—
 "Till, of a sudden, earthquake laid wall low
 "And let the world perceive wild work inside
 "And how, in petrification of surprise,
 "The actors stood,—raised arm and planted
 foot,— 550
 "Mouth as it made, eye as it evidenced,
 "Despairing shriek, triumphant hate,—transfixed,
 "Both he who takes and she who yields the life.
 "As ye become spectators of this scene,
 "Watch obscuration of a pearl-pure fame 555

BOOK XII THE BOOK AND THE RING

" By vapoury films, enwoven circumstance,
 " —A soul made weak by its pathetic want
 " Of just the first apprenticeship to sin
 " Which thenceforth makes the sinning soul secure
 " From all foes save itself, souls' truest foe,— 560
 " Since egg turned snake needs fear no ser-
 pentry,—
 " As ye behold this web of circumstance
 " Deepen the more for every thrill and throe,
 " Convulsive effort to disperse the films
 " And disenmesh the fame o' the martyr,—mark 565
 " How all those means, the unfriended one pursues,
 " To keep the treasure trusted to her breast,
 " Each struggle in the flight from death to life,
 " How all, by procurement of the powers
 " Of darkness, are transformed,—no single ray, 570
 " Shot forth to show and save the inmost star,
 " But, passed as through hell's prism, proceeding
 black
 " To the world that hates white : as ye watch, I
 say,
 " Till dusk and such defacement grow eclipse
 " By,—marvellous perversity of man !— 575
 " The inadequacy and inaptitude
 " Of that self-same machine, that very law
 " Man vaunts, devised to dissipate the gloom,
 " Rescue the drowning orb from calumny,
 " —Hear law, appointed to defend the just, 580
 " Submit, for best defence, that wickedness
 " Was bred of flesh and innate with the bone
 " Borne by Pompilia's spirit for a space,
 " And no mere chance fault, passionate and brief:
 " Finally, when ye find,—after this touch 585
 " Of man's protection which intends to mar
 " The last pin-point of light and damn the disc,—
 " One wave of the hand of God amid the worlds

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK XII

- " Bid vapour vanish, darkness flee away,
 " And let the vexed star culminate in peace 590
 " Approachable no more by earthly mist—
 " What I call God's hand,—you, perhaps,—mere
 chance
 " Of the true instinct of an old good man
 " Who happens to hate darkness and love light,—
 " In whom too was the eye that saw, not dim, 595
 " The natural force to do the thing he saw,
 " Nowise abated,—both by miracle,—
 " All this well pondered,—I demand assent
 " To the enunciation of my text
 " In face of one proof more that 'God is true 600
 " 'And every man a liar'—that who trusts
 " To human testimony for a fact
 " Gets this sole fact—himself is proved a fool;
 " Man's speech being false, if but by consequence
 " That only strength is true: while man is weak, 605
 " And, since truth seems reserved for heaven not
 earth,
 " Plagued here by earth's prerogative of lies,
 " Should learn to love and long for what, one day,
 " Approved by life's probation, he may speak.
 .
 " For me, the weary and worn, who haply prompt 610
 " To mirth or pity, as I move the mood,—
 " A friar who glides unnoticed to the grave,
 " With these bare feet, coarse robe and rope-girt
 waist,—
 " I have long since renounced your world, ye know:
 " Yet what forbids I weigh the prize forgone, 615
 " The worldly worth? I dare, as I were dead,
 " Disinterestedly judge this and that
 " Good ye account good: but God tries the heart.
 " Still, if you question me of my content
 " At having put each human pleasure by, 620

BOOK XII THE BOOK AND THE RING

"I answer, at the urgency of truth :
"As this world seems, I dare not say I know
"—Apart from Christ's assurance which decides—
"Whether I have not failed to taste much joy.
"For many a doubt will fain perturb my choice— 625
"Many a dream of life spent otherwise—
"How human love, in varied shapes, might work
"As glory, or as rapture, or as grace :
"How conversancy with the books that teach,
"The arts that help,—how, to grow good and
 great, 630
"Rather than simply good, and bring thereby
"Goodness to breathe and live, nor, born i' the
 brain,
"Die there,—how these and many another gift
"Of life are precious though abjured by me.
"But, for one prize, best meed of mightiest man, 635
"Arch-object of ambition,—earthly praise,
"Repute o' the world, the flourish of loud trump,
"The softer social fluting,—Oh, for these,
"—No, my friends ! Fame,—that bubble which,
 world-wide
"Each blows and bids his neighbour lend a breath, 640
"That so he haply may behold thereon
"One more enlarged distorted false fool's-face,
"Until some glassy nothing grown as big
"Send by a touch the imperishable to suds,—
"No, in renouncing fame, my loss was light, 645
"Choosing obscurity, my chance was well !"

Didst ever touch such ampollosity
As the monk's own bubble, let alone its spite ?
What 's his speech for, but just the fame he flouts ?
How he dares reprehend both high and low, 650
Nor stoops to turn the sentence "God is true

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK XII

"And every man a liar--save the Pope
 "Happily reigning—my respects to him!"
 And so round off the period. Molinism
 Simple and pure! To what pitch get we next? 655
 I find that, for first pleasant consequence,
 Gomez, who had intended to appeal
 From the absurd decision of the Court,
 Declines, though plain enough his privilege,
 To call on help from lawyers any more— 660
 Resolves earth's liars may possess the world
 Till God have had sufficiency of both:
 So may I whistle for my job and fee!

But, for this virulent and rabid monk,—
 If law be an inadequate machine, 665
 And advocacy, froth and impotence,
 We shall soon see, my blatant brother! That 's
 Exactly what I hope to show your sort!
 For, by a veritable piece of luck,
 The providence, you monks round period with, 67
 All may be gloriously retrieved. Perpend!
 That Monastery of the Convertites
 Whereto the Court consigned Pompilia first,
 —Observe, if convertite, why, sinner then,
 Or what 's the pertinency of award?— 675
 And whither she was late returned to die,
 —Still in their jurisdiction, mark again!—
 That thrifty Sisterhood, for perquisite,
 Claims every piece whereof may die possessed
 Each sinner in the circuit of its walls. 680
 Now, this Pompilia seeing that, by death
 O' the couple, all their wealth devolved on her,
 Straight utilized the respite ere decease,
 By regular conveyance of the goods
 She thought her own, to will and to devise,— 685
 Gave all to friends, Tighetti and the like,

BOOK XII THE BOOK AND THE RING

In trust for him she held her son and heir,
 Gaetano,—trust which ends with infancy :
 So willing and devising, since assured
 The justice of the Court would presently 690
 Confirm her in her rights and exculpate,
 Re-integrate and rehabilitate—
 Place her as, through my pleading, now she stands.
 But here 's the capital mistake : the Court
 Found Guido guilty,—but pronounced no word 695
 About the innocency of his wife :
 I grounded charge on broader base, I hope !
 No matter whether wife be true or false,
 The husband must not push aside the law,
 And punish of a sudden : that 's the point : 700
 Gather from out my speech the contrary !
 It follows that Pompilia, unrelieved
 By formal sentence from imputed fault,
 Remains unfit to have and to dispose
 Of property which law provides shall lapse. 705
 Wherefore the Monastery claims its due :
 And whose, pray, whose the office, but the Fisc's ?
 Who but I institute procedure next
 Against the person of dishonest life,
 Pompilia whom last week I sainted so ? 710
 I it is teach the monk what scripture means,
 And that the tongue should prove a two-edged
 sword,
 No axe sharp one side, blunt the other way,
 Like what amused the town at Guido's cost !
Astraea redux ! I 've a second chance 715
 Before the self-same Court o' the Governor
 Who soon shall see volte-face and chop, change
 sides.
 Accordingly, I charge you on your life,
 Send me with all despatch the judgment late
 O' the Florence Rota Court, confirmative 720

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK XII

O' the prior judgment at Arezzo, clenched
 Again by the Granducal signature,
 Wherein Pompilia is convicted, doomed,
 And only destined to escape through flight
 The proper punishment. Send me the piece,— 725
 I'll work it! And this foul-mouthed friar shall find
 His Noah's-dove that brought the olive back
 Turn into quite the other sooty scout,
 The raven, Noah first put forth the ark,
 Which never came back but ate carcasses! 730
 No adequate machinery in law?
 No power of life and death i' the learned tongue?
 Methinks I am already at my speech,
 Startle the world with "Thou, Pompilia, thus?
 "How is the fine gold of the Temple dim!" 735
 And so forth. But the courier bids me close,
 And clip away one joke that runs through Rome,
 Side by side with the sermon which I send.
 How like the heartlessness of the old hunks
 Arcangeli! His Count is hardly cold, 740
 The client whom his blunders sacrificed,
 When somebody must needs describe the scene—
 How the procession ended at the church—
 That boasts the famous relic: quoth our brute,
 "Why, that 's just Martial's phrase for 'make an
 end'— 745
 "*Ad umbilicum sic percentum est!*"
 The callous dog,—let who will cut off head,
 He cuts a joke and cares no more than so!
 I think my speech shall modify his mirth.
 "How is the fine gold dim!"—but send the piece! 750

Alack, Bottini, what is my next word
 But death to all that hope? The Instrument
 Is plain before me, print that ends my Book

BOOK XII THE BOOK AND THE RING

With the definitive verdict of the Court,
Dated September, six months afterward, 755
(Such trouble and so long the old Pope gave !)

“ In restitution of the perfect fame
“ Of dead Pompilia, *quondam* Guido's wife,
“ And warrant to her representative
“ Domenico Tighetti, barred hereby, 760
“ While doing duty in his guardianship,
“ From all molesting, all disquietude,
“ Each perturbation and vexation brought
“ Or threatened to be brought against the heir
“ By the Most Venerable Convent called 765
“ Saint Mary Magdalen o' the Convertites
“ I' the Corso.”

Justice done a second time !

Well judged. Marc Antony, *Locum-tenens*
O' the Governor, a Venturini too ! 770
For which I save thy name,—last of the list !

Next year but one, completing his nine years
Of rule in Rome, died Innocent my hope
—By some account, on his accession-day.
If he thought doubt would do the next age good, 775
'T is pity he died unapprised what birth
His reign may boast of, be remembered by—
Terrible Pope, too, of a kind,—Voltaire.

And so an end of all i' the story. Strain
Never so much my eyes, I miss the mark 780
If lived or died that Gaetano, child
Of Guido and Pompilia : only find,
Immediately upon his father's death,
A record, in the annals of the town—
That Porzia, sister of our Guido, moved 785
The Priors of Arezzo and their head
Its Gonfalonier to give loyally

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK XII

A public attestation of the right
 O' the Franceschini to all reverence—
 Apparently because of the incident 790
 O' the murder,—there 's no mention made o' the
 crime,

But what else could have caused such urgency
 To cure the mob, just then, of greediness
 For scandal, love of lying vanity,
 And appetite to swallow crude reports 795
 That bring annoyance to their betters?—bane
 Which, here, was promptly met by antidote.
 I like and shall translate the eloquence
 Of nearly the worst Latin ever writ :

“Since antique time whereof the memory 800
 “Holds the beginning, to this present hour,
 “The Franceschini ever shone, and shine
 “Still i' the primary rank, supreme amid
 “The lustres of Arezzo, proud to own
 “In this great family, the flag-bearer, 805
 “Guide of her steps and guardian against foe,—
 “As in the first beginning, so to-day !”

There, would you disbelieve the annalist,
 Go rather by the babble of a bard ?
 I thought, Arezzo, thou hadst fitter souls, 810
 Petrarch,—nay, Buonarroto at a pinch,
 To do thee credit as *vexillifer* !

Was it mere mirth the Patavinian meant,
 Making thee out, in his veracious page,
 Founded by Janus of the Double Face ? 815

Well, proving of such perfect parentage,
 Our Gaetano, born of love and hate,
 Did the babe live or die ? I fain would find !
 What were his fancies if he grew a man ?
 Was he proud,—a true scion of the stock 820
 Which bore the blazon, shall make bright my page—

BOOK XII THE BOOK AND THE RING

Shield, Azure, on a Triple Mountain, Or,
 A Palm-tree, Proper, whereunto is tied
 A Greyhound, Rampant, striving in the slips?
 Or did he love his mother, the base-born,
 And fight i' the ranks, unnoticed by the world? 825

Such, then, the final state o' the story. So
 Did the Star Wormwood in a blazing fall
 Frighten awhile the waters and lie lost.
 So did this old woe fade from memory : 830
 Till after, in the fulness of the days,
 I needs must find an ember yet unquenched,
 And, breathing, blow the spark to flame. It lives,
 If precious be the soul of man to man.

So, British Public, who may like me yet, 835
 (Marry and amen !) learn one lesson hence
 Of many which whatever lives should teach :
 This lesson, that our human speech is naught,
 Our human testimony false, our fame
 And human estimation words and wind. 840
 Why take the artistic way to prove so much ?
 Because, it is the glory and good of Art,
 That Art remains the one way possible
 Of speaking truth, to mouths like mine at least.
 How look a brother in the face and say 845
 "Thy right is wrong, eyes hast thou yet art blind".
 "Thine ears are stuffed and stopped, despite
 their length :
 "And, oh, the foolishness thou countest faith !"
 Say this as silverly as tongue can troll—
 The anger of the man may be endured, 850
 The shrug, the disappointed eyes of him
 Are not so bad to bear—but here 's the plague
 That all this trouble comes of telling truth,
 Which truth, by when it reaches him, looks false,

THE RING AND THE BOOK BOOK XII

Seems to be just the thing it would supplant, 855
 Nor recognizable by whom it left :
 While falsehood would have done the work of truth.
 But Art,—wherein man nowise speaks to men,
 Only to mankind,—Art may tell a truth
 Obliquely, do the thing shall breed the thought, 860
 Nor wrong the thought, missing the mediate word.
 So may you paint your picture, twice show truth,
 Beyond mere imagery on the wall,—
 So, note by note, bring music from your mind,
 Deeper than ever e'en Beethoven dived,— 865
 So write a book shall mean beyond the facts,
 Suffice the eye and save the soul beside.

And save the soul ! If this intent save mine,—
 If the rough ore be rounded to a ring,
 Render all duty which good ring should do, 870
 And, failing grace, succeed in guardianship,—
 Might mine but lie outside thine, Lyric Love,
 Thy rare gold ring of verse (the poet praised)
 Linking our England to his Italy !

